How Afghans' Stern Rulers Took Hold

By JOHN F. BURNS
with STEVE LeVINE

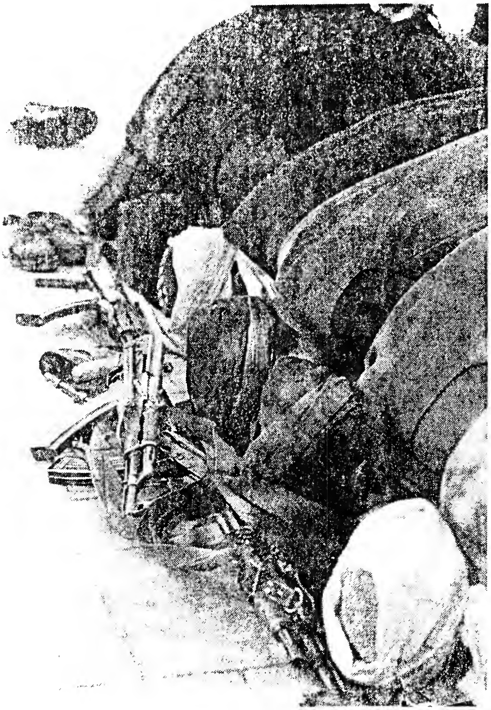
KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — When neighbors came to Mullah Mohammed Omar in the spring of 1994, they had a story that was shocking even by the grim standards of Afghanistan's 18-year-old civil war.

Two teen-age girls from the mullah's village of Singesar had been abducted by one of the gangs of mujahedeen, or "holy warriors," who controlled much of the Afghan countryside. The girls' heads had been shaved, they had been taken to a checkpoint outside the village and they had been repeatedly raped.

At the time, Mullah Omar was an obscure figure, a former guerrilla commander against occupying Soviet forces who had returned home in disgust at the terror mujahedeen groups were inflicting on Afghanistan.

He was living as a student, or talib, in a mud-walled religious school that centered on rote learning of the Koran.

But the girls' plight moved him to act. Gathering 30 former guerrilla fighters, who mustered between them 16 Kalashnikov rifles, he led an attack on the checkpoint, freed the girls and tied the checkpoint commander by a noose to the barrel of an old Soviet tank. As those around him shouted "God is Great!" Mullah Omar ordered the tank barrel raised and left the dead man hanging as a grisly warning.



Reuters

Taliban fighters, who carry their guns to Friday prayer, have had help from Pakistan in their rise to power in Afghanistan.

The Singesar episode is now part of Afghan folklore. Barely 30 months after taking up his rifle, Mullah Omar is the supreme ruler of most of Afghanistan. The mullah, a heavyset 38-year old who lost his right eye in the war against the Russians is known to his followers as Prince of All Believers. He leads an Islamic religious movement, the Taliban, that has conquered 20 of Afghanistan's 32 provinces.

Mullah Omar's call to arms in Singesar is only part of the story of the rise of the Taliban that emerged from weeks of traveling across Afghanistan and from scores of interviews with Afghans, diplomats and others who followed the movement from its earliest days in 1994. It is a story that is still unfolding, with the Taliban struggling to consolidate their hold on Kabul, the capital. The city fell three months ago to a Taliban force of a few thousand fighters, who entered the city with barely a shot fired.

But the Taliban, despite their protestations of independence, did not score their successes alone. Pakistani leaders saw domestic political gains in supporting the movement, which draws most of support from the ethnic Pashtun who predominate along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Perhaps more important, Pakistan's leaders, in funneling supplies of ammunition, fuel and food to the Taliban, hoped to advance an old Pakistani dream of linking their country, through Afghanistan, to an economic and political alliance with the Muslim states of Central Asia.

At crucial moments during the two yea of the Taliban's rise to power, the Unit States stood aside. It did little to discoura support for the Afghan mullahs both fro Pakistan and from another American all

Saudi Arabia, which found its own reasons for supporting the Taliban in their conservative brand of Islam.

American officials emphatically deny the assertion, widely believed among the Taliban's opponents in Afghanistan, that the United States offered the movement covert support. American diplomats' frequent visits to Kandahar, headquarters of the Taliban's governing body, the officials insist, were mainly exploratory.

In fact, American policy on the Taliban has seesawed back and forth. The Taliban have found favor with some American officials, who see in their implacable hostility toward Iran an important counterweight in the region. But other officials remain uncomfortable about the Taliban's policies on women, which they say have created the most backward-looking and intolerant society anywhere in Islam. And they say that the Taliban, despite promises to the contrary, have done nothing to root out the narcotics traffickers and terrorists who have found a haven in Afghanistan under the mujahedeen.

From REUTERS 1/21/97:

UNHCR claims that at least 90,000 people have been displaced inside Afghanistan since the beginning of October, with a further 41,000 seeking refuge in Pakistan.

Marc Kaufman, reporting for the PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER on 1/31, says that unemployment in Kabul is said to be about 90%. The electricity came back on recently, but there is no phone service. The Af. is at 26,000 to the dollar.

In its most recent policy statement on Afghanistan, the State Department called on other nations to "engage" with the Taliban in hopes of moderating their policies. But the statement came as the Taliban were tightening still further their Islamnic social code, particularly the taboos that have banned women from working, closed girls' schools, and required all women beyond puberty to cloak themselves head-to-toe in garments called burqas that are the traditional garb of Afghan village women. The result, so far, is that not a single one of the member countries of the United Nations has recognized the Taliban government and none have come forward with offers of the reconstruction aid the Taliban say will be needed to rebuild this shattered country. In the words of Mullah Mohammed Hassan, one of Mullah Omar's partners in the Taliban's ruling council, "We are the pariahs of the world."

Catching a High Tide Of Afghan Discontent

How the Taliban succeeded in pacifying much of a country that had spent years spiraling into chaos is not, as their progress from Singesar to Kabul attests, primarily a question of military prowess. Much more, it was a matter of a group of Islamic nationalists catching a high tide of discontent that built up when the mujahedeen turned from fighting Russians to plundering, and just as often killing, their own people. By 1994, after five years of mujahedeen terror, the Taliban was a movement whose time had come.

One man who has seen more of the Taliban than any other outsider, Rahimullah Yusufzai, a reporter for The News in Pakistan, put it simply: "The story of the Taliban is not one of outsiders imposing a solution, but of the Aghans themselves seeking deliverance from mujahedeen groups that had become cruel and inhuman. The Afghan people had been waiting a long time for relief from their miseries, and they would have accepted anybody who would have freed them from the tyranny."

In any case, Mullah Omar contends that the decision to act at Singesar was not, at the time, envisaged as a step toward power.

Although he is universally known in Afghanistan as mullah, or giver of knowledge, he is a shy man who still calls himself a talib, or seeker after knowledge. He has met only once with a foreign reporter, Mr. Yusufzai. Mullah Omar said at their meeting in Kandahar that the men at Singesar intended originally only to help local villagers.

"We were fighting against Muslims who had gone wrong," he said. "How could we remain quiet when we could see crimes being committed against women, and the poor?"

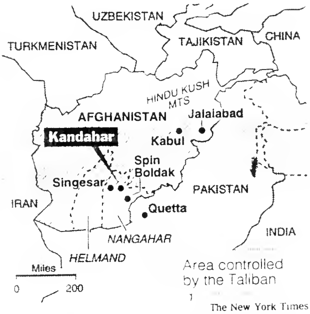
But appeals were soon coming in from villages all around Kandahar. At about the time the two girls were being abducted in Singesar, which is in the Maiwand district 35 miles to the west, two other mujahedeen commanders had confronted each other with tanks in a bazaar in Kandahar, arguing over possession of a young boy both men wanted as a homosexual partner.

In the ensuing battle, dozens of civilians shopping and trading in the bazaar were killed. After the Taliban took control of Kandahar, those commanders, too, ended up hanging from Taliban nooses.

With each new action against the mujahedeen, the Taliban's manpower, and arsenal, grew. Mujahedeen fighters, and sometimes whole units, switched sides, so that the Taliban quickly came to resemble a coalition of many of the country's fighting groups. The new recruits included many men who had served in crucial military positions as pilots, tank commanders and front-line infantry officers in the Afghan Communist forces that fought under Soviet control in the 1980's.

After a skirmish in September 1994, at Spin Boldak, on the border with Pakistan netted the new movement 800 truckloads of arms and ammunition that had been stored in caves since the Soviet occupation, there was no force to match the Taliban. Moving rapidly east and west of Kandahar in the winter of 1994 and the spring of 1995, they rolled up territory. Sometimes, using money said to have come from Saudi Arabia, Taliban commanders paid mujahedeen commanders to give up.

But mostly, it was enough for Taliban units to appear on the horizon with the fluttering white flags symbolizing their Islamic puritanism. "In most places, the people welcomed the Taliban as a deliverance, so there was no need to fight," recalled Mr. Yusufzai, the Pakistani reporter, who has spent more time with the Taliban than any other outsider.



The New York Times

The Taliban moved outward from their base in Kandahar to take new territory.

Another event in Sept. 1994 gave the Taliban their most important external backer.

Naseerullah Babar, Pakistan's Interior Minister, had a vision for extricating his wedge-shaped country from the precarious position in which it was placed when it was created in 1947 by the partition of India from territories running along British India's frontiers with Afghanistan.

Mr. Babar saw a Pakistan linked to the newly independent Muslim republics of what had been Soviet Central Asia, along roads and railways running across Afghanistan. He believed that stability in Afghanistan would mean a potential economic bonanza for Pakistan and a strategic breakthrough for the West. "It was in the West's overall interest," he said in an interview in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. "Unless the Central Asian states have an opening to the sea, they will never be free from Russia."

With the rise of Taliban power around Kandahar, Mr. Babar spied a chance to prove the vision's practicability. Using Pakistan Government funds, he arranged a "peace convoy" of heavily loaded trucks to run rice, clothing and other gifts north from Quetta in Pakistan, through Kandahar, and onward to Ashkhabad, the capital of Turkmenistan.

But outside the American-built airport at Kandahar, a mujahedeen commander guarding one of the thousands of checkpoints that had made an obstacle course of any Afghan journey seized the convoy, demanding ransom. Once again, the Taliban intervened, freeing the convoy and hanging, again from a tank barrel, the commander who hijacked it.

Mr. Babar's subsequent enthusiasm for the Taliban gave rise to a widespread belief among the the group's opponents that they were a Pakistani creation, or at least that their growing military power was sustained by large transfers of cash, arms, and ammunition from Pakistan. Because of Pakistan's close ties with the United States, it was a short step for these Taliban opponents to conclude that Washington was also backing the Taliban.

After Kabul fell in September, Americans venturing into non-Taliban areas north of Kabul faced a common taunt from soldiers of the ousted Government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani. "The Taliban are American puppets!" they said.

But while this was not accurate, there were ties between American officials and the growing movement that were considerably broader than those to any other Western country.

From early on, American diplomats in Islamabad had made regular visits to Kandahar to see Taliban leaders. In briefings for reporters, these diplomats cited what they saw as positive aspects of the Taliban, which they listed as the movement's capacity to end the war in Afghanistan and its promises to put an end to the use of Afghanistan as a base for narcotics trafficking and international terrorism.

Unmentioned, but probably most important to Washington, was that the Taliban, who are Sunni Muslims, have a deep hostility for Iran, America's nemesis, where the ruling majority belong to the rival Shiite sect of Islam.

Along the way, Washington developed yet another interest in the Taliban as potential backers for a 1,200-mile gas pipeline that an American energy company, Union Oil Company of California, has proposed building from Quetta in Pakistan, to Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic that sits atop some of the world's largest gas reserves, but has limited means to export them.

The project, which Unocal executives have estimated could cost $5-billion, would be built in conjunction with the Delta Oil Company, a Saudi Arabian concern that also has close links to the Taliban. Among the advisers Unocal has employed to deal with the Taliban is Robert B Oakley, a former American Ambassador to Pakistan.

American officials, however, denied providing any direct assistance, covert or otherwise, to the Taliban.

Similar assurances were given to Russia and India, as well as indirectly to Iran, countries that were involved in heavy arms shipments of their own to the Taliban's main opponents, the armies of Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum and President Rabbani that control the 12 northern provinces that continue to resist the Taliban.

"We do not have any relationship with the Taliban, and we never have had," David Cohen, the Central Intelligence Agency official who directs the agency's clandestine operations, told Indian officials in New Delhi in November.

Mr. Babar offered similar denials, asserting that "there has been no financial or material aid to the Taliban from Pakistan." But Western intelligence officials in Pakistan said this was a smokescreen for a policy of covert support that Mr. Babar, a retired Pakistani general, had extended to the Taliban after the convoy episode at Kandahar airport.

This support, the intelligence officials said, apart from ammunition and fuel, included the deployment at crucial junctures of Pakistani military advisers. The advisers were easy to hide, since they were almost all ethnic Pashtuns, from the same tribe that make up the overwhelming majority of the Taliban.

No Sign of a Will To Yield to the West

American officials like Robin Raphel, the top State Department official dealing directly with matters involving Afghanistan, have placed heavy emphasis on the hope that contacts with the new rulers in Kabul will encourage them to soften their policies, especially toward women.

They also say that the United States sees the Taliban, with its Islamic conservatism, as the best, and perhaps the only, chance that Afghanistan will halt the poppy growing and opium production that have made Afghanistan, with an estimated 2,500 tons of raw opium a year, the world's biggest single-country source of the narcotic. A similar argument is made on the issue of the network of international terrorists, many of them Arabs, who have set up bases inside Afghanistan.

But as the Taliban consolidate their power in Kabul, the signs of cooperation are not strong. In the week before Christmas, as bitterly cold winds from the 20,000-foot Hindu Kush mountains swept down on Kabul, senior Taliban officials seemed to be in a more pugnacious mood than in October, when a counteroffensive by the Rabbani and Dostum forces came within 10 miles of Kabul.

The attacking forces have since been driven back beyond artillery range, allowing the Taliban to concentrate on tightening their grip on Kabul's restive population of 1.5-million.

The sense that these Taliban leaders now give is that they see little reason to accommodate the West. Reports from United Nations officials monitoring drug flows suggest the Taliban have done nothing to impede the trafficking and that in the key provinces of Helmand and Nangahar — accounting for more than 90 per cent of the opium production — they are in league with the drug producers, taxing them, and storing some of the opium in Taliban-guarded warehouses.

Elusive Positions On Militants and Drugs

Confronted with these reports, Taliban leaders have a stock response. "We intend to stop the drug trafficking, because it is against Islamic laws," they have said. "But until we can rebuild our economy, there are no other jobs, so now is not the time."

The Taliban position on those who support international terrorists is still more elusive. According to Western intelligence estimates, as many as 400 trained terrorists are living in areas under Taliban control, some of them with links to the groups that mounted the bombing of the World Trade Center in Feb 1993 and other major attacks, including the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Ethiopia in 1995 and attacks in France by Algerian militants.

One of the most-wanted terrorists of all, Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian businessman who has been called one of the most significant financial sponsors of Islamic extremists in the world by the State Department, has been spotted within the past month at a heavily guarded home in the Afghan city of Jalalabad, held by the Taliban since early September.

But it is on their attitude toward women that Western governments' attitudes seem most likely to hinge, and on this, the Taliban show no sign of relenting. After a Taliban radio bulletin earlier this month celebrated the fact that 250 Kabul women had been beaten by Taliban in a single day for not observing the dress code, an Australian working as a coordinator for private Western aid agencies in Kabul, Ross Everson, visited one of the city's top Taliban officials, Mullah Mohammed Mutaqi, to appeal for a turn toward what Mr. Everson called "the doctrine of moderation that the Islamic faith is famous for."

Mullah Mutaqi stood up and waved his fist in Mr. Everson's face. "You are insulting us!," he said, Then, snuggling back into the blanket that Taliban officials wear around their shoulders for warmth in the unheated offices of Kabul, he made his clinching argument.

"I must ask you, are you the Muslim here, or am I?" he said. "If you Westerners want to help us, you are welcome, otherwise you are free to leave Afghanistan. You may think we cannot survive without you, but I can tell you, God will provide the Taliban with everything we need."

THE NEW YORK TIMES **INTERNATIONAL** *TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1996*

Getting to Know the Taliban

- As forces of the conservative Islamic militia of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement pushed their way toward a strategic tunnel connecting Kabul with northern Afghanistan this week, American officials appeared to have stepped up contacts with the group.

A delegation of Taliban representatives arrives in New York today and is expected to make the rounds at the State Department next week, according to officials there. This follows meetings in Pakistan Tuesday between **Robin Raphel**, assistant secretary of state for South Asia, and one of the movement's leaders, Mullah **Wakil Ahmed**.

The Taliban has enforced strict Islamic rule on the two-thirds of Afghanistan it controls. While Washington does not recognize any faction as being the legitimate governmen in Kabul, it has not ruled out anything for the future.

"We address the issues of narcotics and terrorism, and we are also trying to get them to settle their war," a State Department official said. It has been very difficult to figure out the hierarchy of leadership of the movement, which operates secretively but in a collegial manner, the official added.

A similar Taliban team came to Washington last June, as part of a series of contacts begun two years ago, the official said. "This isn't like a state visit or anything like that. When people want to talk to us about Afghanistan, we talk to them," he added. . . .

WP 1/24/97

The Taliban of late, have turned their guns towards males, demanding them to grow proper beard and say prayers five times a day. There have been reports that a large number of people in Kabul had been sent behind the bars for not following the instructions. Under the prevailing condition, people in Kabul like to stay in doors. It's just obvious.

The Muslim
1/1/97

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Afghan peace moot opens in Ashkabad

MONITORING REPORT

JANUARY 21: A major conference on Afghanistan has opened in the Tajek capital Ashakabad with a call by UN Under Secretary General Yasushi Akashi for urgent assistance to rebuild the country and thus help restore peace.

The conference organised by the UN is being attended by donor organisations, representatives from some 200 donor countries and Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

Inaugurating the conference President of Tajekistan Saphar Murad Niazov, whose country has 860 km border with Afghanistan offered to mediate between the rival factions as his country was completely neutral in Afghan conflict. He quoted a Tajek saying that when the neighbour's house was burning, one cannot live in peace.

Yasushi Akashi, who is under secretary general for humanitarian affairs read out a message of Secretary General Kufi Annan reaffirming UN commitment to do everything possible for peace in Afghanistan and appealed to Afghan people, neighbouring countries and those involved in Afghanistan peace efforts to support UN efforts to help end the conflict.

Akashi said it was not necessary to wait for cessation of hostilities in Afghanistan and then start the reconstruction work. He said most parts of Afghanistan were peaceful and rebuilding activities could begin immediately. He expressed concern that Afghan economy was being influenced by crimes as arms and drugs were being smuggled out and different factions were continuing fighting from the money thus generated.

Yasushi Akashi opposed proposals by different international companies to set up oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan and said money for these projects would go into the pockets of some people and would not benefit the common man. He expressed his regrets over lack of international response to UN appeal in December for 130 million dollars of aid and said only one percent aid has so far been committed.

BBC correspondent said Afghan people have little hopes from this major conference keeping in view the past experiences from UN and other institutions. However, at such a large gathering, first of its kind, donors have expressed their difficulties but said that reconstruction work could begin which would brighten the peace prospects.

Meanwhile reports from Afghanistan speak of economic difficulties in northern parts of the country controlled by General Rashid Dostum. Reports say local currency has depreciated by fifty percent as compared to dollar and prices of essential items have increased dramatically over the last five weeks.

AFP adds: Thousands of refugees poured out of the northern Afghan town of Charikar heading for Kabul as the Taliban and coalition forces exchanged artillery fire on the town's outskirts.

Inside the city scores of buses were parked in long queues as residents loaded their children and belongings while those who could not afford the fares began leaving on foot despite freezing temperaturs, an AFP journalist saw.

Hundreds of families with belongings packed on trucks and buses were seen heading to the Afghan capital from Charikar which lies at the foothills of the now snow-covered Hindu Kush range.

Just three kilometres (two miles) to the north heavy artillery belonging to the Islamic militia and the anti-Taliban coalition forces under former defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood and northern warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum exchanged fire.

There were no infantry clashes around Charikar, the capital of Parwan province, 64 kilomters (40 miles) north of Kabul, which fell to the Islamic militia last week. "We want to leave the city because our houses are within rocket range of the other side, one resident said, adding that people feared the fighting might resume.

All shops in the city, which once had around 100,000 people, were closed and there was no vehicle traffic except those transporting the refugees. The radical Islamic militia, which controls two thirds of the country, launched a lightning attack Thursday capturing the key Bagram airbase, 50 kilometres from Kabul and nearby Charikar

Meanwhile, Dr Norberg Holl, the head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) has said that the aid Afghanistan needs most of this time is a concerted international assistance for an early political settlement and the establishment of an acceptable and broadbased government in the country. International goodwill and humanitarian resources were not unlimited and were bound to be exhausted unless they were sustained by optimism and positive results on the political front.

Dr Holl delivering his keynote address to the International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan in Ashkabad on Tuesday pointed out that the downward trend in donor assistance to Afghanistan in the last few years indicated the close link between continued flow of aid and the political process and that donor countries were increasing mainly making their assistance contingent on progress in the political negotiations and dialogue. This link was an important point that the Afghan leaders especially the warring sides, needed to understand clearly for the benefit of the suffering Afghan people

The Muslim 1/22

Russia warns of Afghan intervention

3y Mark Huband
n Mazar-I-Sharif

"If Taliban came into the orth there would be terrible loodshed. And if our bor- rs were under threat we ould take appropriate mea- ures," said Mr Nikolae chevchenko, head of the ussian diplomatic delega- on. The delegation has een based in the northern wn of Mazar-i-Sharif since e seizure of Kabul by the aliban in September.

"The Russian role in the gion is inevitable," he said, ecifying that Russia views borders as those of its uthern neighbours Uzbeki- an, Tajikistan and Turk- enistan.

"I believe that considering aliban's actions and their eology, that they are plan- ing to come here, and they e preparing their expan- on as far as Samarkand, d we think their coming re would be a threat to the S," he said.

Seven years after the viet withdrawal from ghanistan, the war- vaged country is now ore than ever the focus of gional rivalry.

"There's a trilateral alli- ice between Russia, India d a third state. None of these three powers wants a return of peace, because it's not in their economic interest," said Mr Umar Khan Alisherzai, Pakistan's consul general in Afghanistan, avoiding naming Iran as the third country involved.

"It's basically an economic war that Russia and other powers are pursuing. These Central Asian countries and northern Afghanistan are full of natural resources. Russia won't be able to exploit these resources, because it doesn't have the investment capability, and fears competition from the more technically developed economies of the west."

Russian officials are agreed that economics is central to the strategy being played by all the countries involved, though they claim that Russian technology and political presence will provide a balance between western interests and Iran's regional goals.

Despite its close ties with Taliban, such direct interests have led Pakistan to remain on reasonable terms with the northern faction leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum, allegedly supported by Russia and Iran.

"Pakistan has a declared enemy on one side, and cannot have another enemy on the other," said a senior Pakistani military source, going further than most Pakistani officials in acknowledging Pakistan's support for the Taliban.

Iran, ruled by a Shia Moslem clerical regime, has played the most active role in forging the alliance against the Sunni Taliban, encouraging the factions led by Gen Dostum and Gen Ahmed Shah Massoud to unite in creating the committee for the defence of Afghanistan in the north of the country.

Cargo flights of the Dostum-owned Balkh Air fly regularly from Mazar-i-Sharif to Masshad, in eastern Iran, aviation officials in Mazar-i-Sharif confirmed. Diplomats close to the alliance have confirmed that weapons supplies are coming from Iran. At least one intelligence service in the region says chemical weapons have been acquired by the northern factions

US officials deny their tacit acceptance of Taliban stems from Iran's opposition to the new regime in Kabul. But as US and Pakistani interests coincide, the US need do little more than have its ally pursue policy on its behalf, avoiding the thorny issue of Taliban's principles, about which Pakistan has no illusions.

FINANCIAL TIMES 12/18

AL WATAN AL ARABI

America's Link to the Taliban

■ *Before the Taliban Islamic movement overran Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, news reports linked the fundamentalist army to U.S. intelligence. While the CIA is often accused of having a sinister hand in overseas events, and direct evidence is usually scant, the allegations of Washington's role in Afghanistan have persisted. The Paris-based "Al-Watan al-Arabi" gives details about how the project may have been conducted and why: to take revenge for the World Trade Center bombing and to isolate Iran. Pakistan and the U.S. are presented as major players here, but the role of Saudi Arabia, possibly as a financial backer for the operation, is absent—something that might be expected from any publication reluctant to offend the kingdom. An accompanying article from another Paris weekly, "Jeune Afrique," spells out the economic interests at play in this new version of the "great game" in Central Asia.*

What is the relationship between Washington and the Taliban movement? The appearance of the Taliban and its victory over warring Afghan factions is, in fact, the result of a secret operation whose threads were woven by the White House, the United Nations, the CIA, and the centers of military and political power in Islamabad. The operation involves international objectives that run deeper than just restoring peace to Afghanistan.

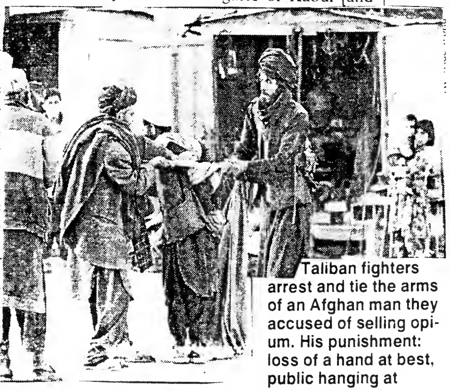
Information obtained by *Al-Watan al-Arabi* from more than one source indicates that the true story of the Taliban is closely connected to an international plan to combat Islamic fundamentalism and the international terrorism of its networks. The decision to "create" the movement, or, at least, the American incentive to do so, coincided with the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City in February, 1993. American investigators wasted few days before discovering that their former allies in Afghanistan's war with the Soviet Union had been behind the bombing.

American intelligence came up with a list of about 100 of the "Afghan Arabs" who had graduated from the *mujahedin* camps and were suspected of having played direct or indirect roles in the New York bombing. Because of the shock of the first terrorist operation conducted by "Muslim fundamentalism" in the U.S., the Americans decided to wage an unrelenting war to hunt and punish the perpetrators, focusing their attention on their main mentor, Islamic Party leader and then Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was willing to abandon her "ally" Hekmatyar. But in return, she had one basic condition: No help for Ahmad Shah Massoud, the ethnic Tajik leader in northern Afghanistan. Pakistan was obsessed with the possibility of an alliance among Tajikistan, India, and Russia.

In October, 1994, the Afghan factions and the world at large were shocked by the appearance of an armed, organized, and trained movement. In just a few months, the Taliban took one third of Afghanistan. Observers were also prised when the American ambassador in Islamabad, along with Pakistani In- rior Minister Naseerullah Kahn Babar, toured the new Taliban communities in Pakistan. Taliban followers were trained at schools run by the Muslim Scholars Society, which counts Babar as a sponsor.

By February, 1995, the Taliban practically reached the gates of Kabul [and swept Hekmatyar from his base 10 miles south of the capital], having already controlled a large number of provinces, often meeting no significant resistance. Wherever it prevailed, the Taliban imposed *Sharia,* Islamic law. It was determined to burn opium fields and close camps that trained Muslim extremists of other nationalities, the two main American demands. The Taliban also opened the silk road with Turkmenistan for Pakistani truck convoys.



Taliban fighters arrest and tie the arms of an Afghan man they accused of selling opium. His punishment: loss of a hand at best, public hanging at worst.

A big setback for the American-Pakistani project, however, was Kabul's resistance and the failure of the Taliban to invade the capital. Washington began to reassess the project. But new factors and developments led to the intensification of American efforts. Iran played a major role in seeing to that.

From the start, Tehran believed that the Taliban was not only a Sunni Muslim group, pro-American and pro-Pakistani, but was also anti-Persian. Iranian Revolutionary Guards conducted military operations inside Afghanistan to confront the Taliban. Iran later intervened to support Kabul. Iranian initiatives produced educational, health, social, and military agreements between Kabul and Tehran—and led to the opening of an Iranian consulate in Afghanistan. They also outraged the U.S. Maybe the most important aspect of its Afghan project became putting Iran under siege, thereby isolating it militarily, politically, and economically.

September, 1995, the ican oil company Unocal d a huge deal with Turk- tan to construct a gas ne that would bypass Iran nning through Afghan- This project is expected to move 20 billion cubic meters of gas annually for a period of 30 years. Observers recall that a Unocal consultant said in October, 1994, that "the Taliban are the liberators of Afghanistan." This statement became reality two years later.

During that period there was an increase in Iranian threats in the Persian Gulf, as well as a wave of terrorists' explosions. The most notable of these was the assassination of American diplomats in Karachi, the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, and the explosions that killed U.S. military personnel in Riyadh and Khobar. Investigations into all these operations pointed to a major role of Islamic extremists who took refuge in Afghanistan and were supported by Tehran. This made the Americans act quickly to reactivate the Taliban and support it until it won.

Americans have described the Taliban as "probably opposing Western modernism, but not against the West itself." The U.S. insists that there are no differences or animosities between Washington and Islam, as long as Islam stays away from armed extremism of the Iranian kind. Observers agree that Washington does not really care much about the internal Afghan situation or the shape of the government. It cares about Afghanistan's regional dimension and an alliance with Pakistan against fundamentalism and Iranian expansionism.

In this case, American intelligence has accomplished its greatest achievement in recent years by destroying the Muslim extremists' camps and putting Iran under siege. Many observers believe this "Afghan operation" was envisioned at the same time as U.S. intelligence was suffering from a campaign of criticism and ridicule following its setback in northern Iraq.

The question now is, what will the Taliban really do? Will it carry out the main points of the American project, to expel the "Afghan Arabs," stop the drug production, and lay siege to Iran, or will it turn against Washington and Islamabad, just as Hekmatyar and other leaders of the Afghan factions did before?

—Nael Mokhayber, "Al-Watan al-Arabi" (Arabic weekly), Paris, Oct. 11, 1996.

Taliban bans kite flying, gambling

KABUL (AFP) - Taliban religious police have banned kite flying, dog-fighting and releasing homing-pigeons in Kabul public parks, an official report said Saturday, in an apparent crackdown on gambling.

The recreational activities were stopped during a police tour of parks on Friday, the announcement by state-run Radio Shariat said without giving a reason for the ban.

Residents, however, suggested the police were targetting gambling and other crimes.

'Betting is involved in most of these games, and as gambling is prohibited in Islam, the Taliban have cracked down,' an Afghan elder told AFP.

A large wasteland called Chaman-i-Babrak in the northwestern Kabul district of Khair Khana is a popular recreational venue especially on Fridays, the sole non-working day in Afghanistan.

Dog fighting is recognised by many Afghanis as a traditional winter sport with large sums of money at stake.

With kite flying, gambling is a lesser concern but the elder said the high replacement cost of string and materials meant officials could be concerned children would be lured into theft to recover losses.

Direct gambling reportedly does not take place on homing-pigeons, but birds are often lured to rival roosts and the owners must pay a 'fine' for the return of the wayward pigeons, the elder said.

A small market in central Kabul where pigeons and other birds are bought and sold was still bustling with activity Saturday, although merchants said they had heard the Radio Shariat report.

'We haven't been told not to sell these birds, but if the people do not fly them there will be no customers,' one pigeon-seller said.

The price of homing pigeons at the bazaar ranged from 10,000 to 30,000 afghani (45 cents to 1.30 dollars).

'I cannot afford to keep these birds and feed them if I can't sell them,' the merchant added.

He said he had already made a loss of 27,000 afghani on the sale of three birds, just so he could get rid of them.

Other sporting activities which Afghans wager money on include camel -fighting, cock-fighting, quail-fighting.

The Nation 1/5/97

Reviving the 'Great Game'

Television carried the image worldwide of a tank crushing bottles of wine and beer—a symbol of the Taliban victory in Kabul. Since then, regular Red Cross flights have taken in dozens of journalists. They have followed the sequence of events: women prohibited from working, a crackdown on musicians, and forced prayer in the mosques. Then came the counterattack by the forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud, whose fighters perched on the turrets of old tanks, and the orderly convoys of ethnic Uzbek forces under the command of General Abdul Rashid Dostum. But behind these stirring scenes, the political, economic, and strategic future of Central Asia is being played out.

The "great game," described at the turn of the century by Rudyard Kipling, has returned. This time, however, the U.S. is playing the lead role. Washington has discerned a number of crucial interests. The chief aim is to prevent Iran from extending its influence. But Washington has a second goal: to weaken the traditional Russian influence in the region. Contrary to official speeches about the end of the cold war, the idea is still to prevent Moscow's reemergence as a major power.

Naturally, economic interests play a significant role. The Central Asian republics, especially Turkmenistan, have enormous reserves of natural gas and, to a lesser extent, oil.

Ever since America's Unocal and the Saudis' Delta Oil signed the deal to construct a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan, the rivalry between Afghan factions took on new importance. For the Americans, it became essential to secure control over the territory that the future pipeline would cross. That task was given to the Taliban, who were supplied jointly by the American and Pakistani services.

In the new "great game," the U.S. has won the first round with the Taliban's taking of Kabul. But the game is far from over. The Russian government hastily arranged a conference in the capital of Kazakstan, bringing together Central Asian leaders. But Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov says that there is no question of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

For Tehran, U.S.-Pakistani control of Afghanistan's territory is unthinkable. That not only would open up the Central Asian republics to U.S. economic interests but also would provide rear bases for an armed Iranian opposition. The influence Iran enjoys over the ethnic Hazara gives it means of action.

For New Delhi, the affair is another episode in its confrontation with Pakistan. The Indian government will do all it can to prevent its neighbor from gaining control with U.S. support over Afghanistan. Indian agents are already working with the Russians to strengthen the fragile anti-Taliban coalition, which has proved more solid than expected.

Has the time for negotiations come? Pakistan's minister of the interior, Naseerullah Babar, has offered a deal, with Washington's approval: General Dostum gets control of the Uzbek region, Massoud controls the Tajik region, while the Taliban remain masters of most of the country.

The Americans have sorted out their options. The Taliban's repression shocked the whole world, especially the American press. The Russo-Iranian-Indian coalition could prove to be formidable. So, the Americans have set their goals a bit lower, willing to sacrifice a few pawns without losing sight of the main goal: control of the areas in the center and the West—providing access to Turkmenistan and its vast energy resources. These are the stakes in the next round of this "great game" in which the peoples of the region are both playthings and victims.

—Paul-Marie de La Gorce, "Jeune Afrique" (independent, Africa-oriented newsmagazine), Paris, Oct. 30-Nov. 5, 1996.

JEUNE AFRIQUE

U.S. Holds High-Level Discussions with the Taleban

Assistant Secretary of State Robin Rafael met with Taleban leaders on Jan. 22 and a four-man Taleban delegation traveled to Washington the next day to meet U.S. officials and to claim Afghanistan's seat at the United Nations, a seat which continues to be held by the representative of the Afghan Government of President Burhannudin Rabbani.

The meeting, which constituted the highest-level contacts between Washington and the Taleban since the Pakistan-backed movement seized the Afghan capital of Kabul on Sept 27, came one week after the Taleban seized strategic territory north of Kabul, including the city of Charikar, the nearby Bagram airbase, and a large portion of Kapisa province.

The Taleban victories in northern Afghanistan were followed by the forced transfer of 60,000 Afghans from Charikar, the capital of Parwan province. Charikar is strategically important because it is close to the Panjsher Valley stronghold of pro-Rabbani military commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, and is on the main road linking Kabul to the Salang Pass, the gateway to General Abdul Rashid Dostum's northern heartland. Massoud and Dostum have joined together in a tenuous alliance against the Taleban.

Rabbani's government strongly condemned the civilian deportations and has called upon the United Nations to act to ensure that those forcibly removed from their homes be allowed to return. Most of those who were transferred were of the elderly, women, and children. Many of them left behind all of their possessions and were forced to walk nearly 50 miles to Kabul, a war-ravaged city which lacks even basic public services. The trek took place in freezing cold weather and no accommodation was made for the displaced after they reached the capital.

"With the motive of tearing apart the whole national fabric of Afghan society in general, and of terrorizing the civilian population of the province in particular, the Taleban mercenaries on January 17 forcibly transferred and deported more than 60,000 members of the population of Charikar and other townships of the province to the capital, Kabul," said acting Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai.

"The heinous policy of coercive eviction and mass deportation of the civilian population, which is a crime against humanity, is being carried out in Afghanistan... The United Nations is called upon to prepare the circumstances allowing all civilians who have been deported and forcibly displaced to return to their homes without being subjected to discrimination on the basis on gender, age, or ethnic origin."

Taleban commander Azizullah Aga explained that the expulsions took place because the Taleban fear that the residents of Charikar may harbor Massoud collaborators because most of the population of the city is ethnically Tajik, while most Taleban fighters are ethnically Pushtun. Charikar, the Bagram airbase and the other areas the Taleban captured in mid-January had been briefly occupied by the Taleban in October. However the local population of the region strongly opposed the Pakistani-backed movement and, after a short time, the areas were liberated by Massoud.

While the United States made no comment about the forced transfer, it has officially criticized the Taleban for human rights violations against women. Rafael's meeting, however, underscored that the United States continues to maintain high level contacts with the group.

The United States has also supported U.N. efforts to increase humanitarian and economic aid to the Taleban. The United Nations held a two-day aid forum in Turkmenistan in January . . .

Earlier the U.N. had threatened to cut off aid to Afghanistan in protest against Taleban decrees, but the two-day conference underscored that, in fact, international aid has increased since the Taleban ousted the Rabbani government.

Many in the region have, in fact, claimed that the United States, along with Great Britain and Pakistan, were behind the rapid growth of the movement. Ironically, while the Taleban have passed strict decrees restricting women from leaving their homes and forbidding women the right to work or go to school, the movement has never shied away from maintaining very close relations with female diplomats such as Rafael or with the previous Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto.

In the Pushtu language, Taleban means students of religion. The word comes from the fact that many in the movement come from religious schools in Pakistan which had been under the supervision of a traditional Ulama association whose leaders have always shared close relations with the Pakistan People's Party of Benazir Bhutto and received funding from Saud Arabia.

The particular religious school from which the Taleban come us the Dars-e-Nizami, a syllabus whic has not changed in more than 30 years and is based strictly on th Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, the graduates of th schools maintain the radical position that any Muslim who is outsid of the Hanafi school is outside o Islam. . . .

The environment in which the Taleban are educated provides for a situation in which they have little knowledge of the world they live in. Affairs of state and society have traditionally been beyond their concern and they played no role in the Jihad against the Soviet Union.

The schools, however, instill in their students the principle of deep respect and obedience to one's Mawla, or religious teacher . . . and when the Mawla called upo his students to fight against th government of President Rabban the students, again, blindly followe suit without inquiring into whe the money and weapons for th fight came from or whose interes the fight was serving.

Muslim World Monitor

January, 1997

Indian Movie Musicals, a Mark of Relative Freedom, Becoming Scarce

By RANJAN ROY Associated Press

MAZAR-E-SHARIF, Afghanistan (AP) – In one of the few areas of Afghanistan not under Taliban control, video store owner Suleiman makes a living off the escapist, Indian-made musical movies so popular in South Asia.¶

For now, at least. Suleiman's livelihood has been declared un-Islamic by the Taliban, the religious army imposing its own rules about what Afghans can see, hear and wear as it sweeps across the country.¶

"I will probably have to shut my shop if the Taliban ever reaches here. Maybe I will start selling Korans," said Suleiman, who like many Afghans uses one name.¶

Mazar-e-Sharif, 185 miles northwest of Kabul, is in the corner of Afghanistan still controlled by Taliban rival Rashid Dostum. Dostum has struggled to repel Taliban advances on his northwest stronghold in recent days, and provided troops to fight north of the capital.¶

Mazar-e-Sharif would still be considered conservative by Western standards – women on the streets are careful to hide their hair under scarves, and many wear burqas, which cover their entire bodies.¶

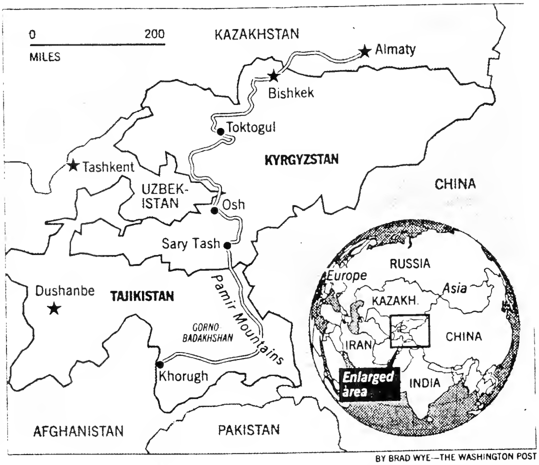
Only men are allowed in the town's two movie theaters, and Suleiman said many men don't allow their wives and daughters to watch the videos they rent or buy at his shop.¶

Though the shop walls are covered by pictures of glamorous, scantily clad Indian starlets, Suleiman, like many other town residents, says he wouldn't want his female relatives to look like that.¶

"It is just not part of our culture," he said.¶ 11/3/96

Part of Ancient Silk Road Is Now Opium Road

By Brian Killen
Reuter



BY BRAD WYE—THE WASHINGTON POST

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan, Oct. 2—The great Silk Road once saw camel caravans bearing tea, textiles and spices to Europe through Central Asia's steppe and desert. Today it is a major smuggling route for deadly drugs, mostly opium from the poppy fields of war-torn Afghanistan.

For drug traffickers seeking to reach lucrative Russian and European markets, the highway from Khorugh, near the Afghan-Tajik border, to Osh, in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, is an increasingly attractive gateway.

Ill-equipped border controls pose no serious obstacle on the main road, while hardy nomads with unknown loads travel unnoticed through numerous Pamir Mountain passes in a region known as "the roof of the world."

Kyrgyzstan, a poor country sandwiched between Tajikistan and China to the south, Uzbekistan to the west and Kazakhstan to the north, has called for international help to combat a surge in the narcotics business that is feeding organized crime.

"You have seen the border with Kazakhstan," Interior Minister Omurbek Kuttuev told a U.N. delegation in Bishkek, the capital. "There is only one border post, nothing else, and the other borders are no better. We have no tight border with Tajikistan and recently the frontier between Tajikistan and Afghanistan has been virtually open to anyone."

The opium trail enters Kyrgyzstan from the lawless Tajik mountain region of Gorno-Badakhshan, an Islamic rebel bastion beyond the control of the Tajik central government.

The highway to Osh is known as the "road of life," for it is Gorno-Badakhshan's only link with the outside world. The impoverished region depends on Kyrgyz food supplies, and drugs are often the only way to get cash for payment.

Vincent Del Buono, a U.N. crime expert, said the mountains are extremely difficult to patrol and drugs are making their way through "to everywhere." But he said that the U.N. Drug Control Program "is actively involved in efforts to control this."

The Kyrgyz authorities, while welcoming the international aid received so far, say more is needed as the local "narco-mafia" becomes increasingly sophisticated and develops ties with Kazakh and Russian groups.

"We don't have enough of anything. We are working on sheer enthusiasm at the moment. We have to improve our equipment," Deputy Interior Minister Aalybay Kaipov said.

In the mountains south of Osh, helicopters might be the only way to monitor the frontier but the region's border guards have little more than their intuition to help them.

Kyrgyz border posts are located deep in the Pamir mountains, where the winter is bitterly cold. At an altitude of more than 13,000 feet, sniffer dogs are ineffective and the slow search process mainly involves tapping the panels of cars and trucks, dismantling engines and wheels and poking around with a long wire.

Kaipov said opium from Afghanistan started to appear three or four years ago, with the smuggling thriving as neighboring Tajikistan plunged into civil war. More recently, heroin has started showing up.

Kaipov estimated only one-tenth of the amount that enters Kyrgyzstan is confiscated. About two tons of opium seized since 1991 is stacked in sacks in a vault at the Interior Ministry headquarters in Osh.

Ministry figures show that about 2,100 pounds of all kinds of drugs were confiscated by police in the first eight months of this year. In the same period last year, only about 1,100 pounds were seized.

Kaipov said most of the drugs came along the Osh-Khorugh highway and there was evidence to show that much had reached Russia and even Europe. It was impossible to estimate the quantity, he said.

The effect in Kyrgyzstan has been an explosion in the number of drug-related crimes, from 904 in 1990 to 2,623 last year.

"Demand for drugs is growing. It is an endless fight and we must change our methods of working," Kaipov said. "We have to deal a massive blow to the source of the drugs. We need to influence the Afghan government and we have to get international backing. If there was one power in Afghanistan it would be possible to settle this question."

Afghanistan has endured years of fighting against Soviet occupiers, who left defeated in 1989; factional guerrilla warfare followed. The strict Islamic Taliban militia took over Kabul, the capital, last week after the government and its military commanders fled. Taliban declared the country an entirely Islamic state.

Timur Issakov, deputy head of the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry's anti-drug department, said the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had contributed to the problem.

"It was not clear who the borders belonged to and who was responsible for them," he said. "A corridor was gradually formed."

THE WASHINGTON POST

OCTOBER 3, 1996

A U.S. nightmare grows in Afghan poppy fields

Afghanistan has emerged from years of war as a world leader in opium. How? With help from Washington.

The Philadelphia Inquirer MICHAEL S. WIR

Sunset near Nad-i-Ali, Afghanistan, finds a farmer irrigating a poppy field with water from the American-built Boghra canal.

By Marc Kaufman
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

NAD-I-ALI, Afghanistan — As the golden sun sets over the rich fields outside this village of mud houses and turbaned men, farmers tend to their crops, weeding, fertilizing and bringing precious water to the sprouting plants.

It is the kind of scene American planners had in mind in the 1950s when they began transforming the barren deserts of southern Afghanistan into lucrative cropland. In one of the most expensive U.S. foreign-aid projects of the time, dams were built along the Helmand River, canals were dug, highways were laid, and new cities grew.

Today, that huge American investment has paid off. Despite 18 years of war in Afghanistan, the Helmand River Valley is producing a world-class crop that earns huge sums of cash. Farmers all along the valley say they have just planted their biggest crop ever.

But there is a problem: That world-class crop is opium poppies.

Seldom have American good intentions abroad gone so spectacularly wrong.

By U.N. estimates, Afghanistan is now the world's largest supplier of opium — producing more than 2,200 tons in 1996. American estimates are somewhat lower, showing Afghanistan at No. 2, but coming up fast.

American officials are painfully aware that Afghan land made fertile thanks to several hundred millions of dollars from American taxpayers now produces narcotics for American and European addicts. Narcotics experts estimate that heroin made from refined Afghan opium accounts for almost one-fifth of the heroin coming into the United States. In Europe, the percentage from Afghanistan is much higher.

The ground zero of Afghan poppy cultivation is along the American-irrigated, flood-controlled plains of the Helmand River. State Department statistics show that more than half of the Afghan poppy crop now grows in Helmand Province.

"The Afghan poppy crop has tripled since 1990, and, unfortunately, a lot of that is coming from Helmand," said Kimberly Fordyce-App of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law. "And the potential is there to grow much, much bigger."

Given the chaotic conditions in Afghanistan today — war still rages in the north, and poor farmers in the south are rebuilding slowly from 18 years of war — there is little Americans can do about it. The only formal American anti-opium program in Afghanistan is a $250,000 annual crop-substitution effort for the Helmand River Valley.

This year's poppy crop is only an inch high now and impossible from afar to distinguish from winter wheat or other crops. Up close, however, the soft, fuzzy poppy leaves are clearly visible. By spring, large swaths of the 100-mile valley will be bright with red, white and purple poppy flowers.

The opium business is centered in Sangin, on the Helmand River, a one-road market town where plastic sacks of the drug are sold like so much wheat or dried apricots. There are at least 60 opium merchants in Sangin, local residents say.

These main poppy fields are in areas controlled by the Islamic fundamentalists of the Taliban. The movement took over southern Afghanistan two years ago, overran the capital, Kabul, in September, and is still fighting in the north.

Given the strong prohibitions in Islam against drug use and the entirely public nature of the opium business, it seems logical that the Taliban would have quickly shut it all down. Instead, the already substantial Helmand poppy crop expanded after the Taliban arrived.

And the fundamentalists make no promises about controlling it anytime soon. The farmers, they say, need the poppies to rebuild their lives.

"We cannot banish the poppy until our people have other crops to grow and work to do," said Mullah Abdul Hamid Akhundaza, the Taliban director of the foreign ministry's liaison office in Kandahar, the southern Afghan city where the Taliban originated.

"Our country has been ruined," he said through an interpreter. "How can we tell farmers to stop growing poppies and have no food for their children?"

Others suggest the Taliban has a different motive for its apparently hands-off policy on opium: It is still fighting an expensive war in the north and needs cash to feed and supply its army. In war-ravaged Afghanistan, there are few other products for a government to tax.

Poppy merchants and farmers say (and narcotics experts confirm) that there are three main smuggling paths for opium coming from the Helmand Valley. Some goes through Pakistan and some north through the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, but much of the Afghan opium takes a wild ride through Iran to heroin factories in Turkey.

Caravans of 50, 80, and sometimes 100 pickups and small trucks make their way across the deserts of Iran, often with the heavily armed protection of Afghan warlords.

Afghans report (and the State Department again confirms) a history of pitched battles with Iranian authorities as the drug caravans fight their way through Iran.

So even if the Taliban wanted to stop the opium trafficking, it is not certain that it could.

But there is one more reason that the poppy crops are flourishing: Many Afghans in positions of power are unhappy with current U.S. policy.

During the Cold War, America spent lavishly on Afghan aid programs and, later, to arm the Afghan *mujaheddin* fighting Soviet troops. Military aid to the *mujaheddin* was the biggest covert aid effort in U.S. history, and many believe that the Russian defeat in Afghanistan played a major role in the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since the Russians left in 1989 and the Afghan communist government fell in 1992, American support for Afghanistan has plummeted. In fact, the direct U.S. aid program for Afghanistan was disbanded after Congress shut down the aid program in neighboring Pakistan because that nation was suspected of building an atom bomb. The Afghan and Pakistani programs had been run out of the same U.S. Agency for International Development office.

Taliban officials say they are not pleased with the steep decline in U.S. aid to Afghanistan. They are also unhappy that the United States has not taken the lead in recognizing their government, which remains internationally isolated.

Sometimes by inference but often quite directly, they make clear that their eagerness to attack the poppy problem will depend on whether formal recognition comes and on what sort of aid projects the U.S. is willing to sponsor for Afghanistan.

One frequently heard request is that Americans come back to the Helmand River Valley to repair the canals and dams and roads they built, all of which now serve fields filled with miles and miles of opium poppy seedlings.

With a smoothness reflecting 15 years in the business, Haji Amin offers a sample of brown goo — opium — left over from 1996.

■

Haji Amin pulled up on his motorbike carrying a heavy plastic bag. He placed it on the floor, untied a knot and spread the bag open to show off his product, a thick, brown goo that jiggled like a bowl of jello.

"Would you like to taste?" he asked pleasantly.

The brown goo was 18 pounds of opium, a leftover from last year's bumper crop. Amin is an opium merchant, has been for 15 years, and makes no excuses for it. He tells of his business with a quick smile, his eyes dancing.

His home is Sangin, a swirl of trucks, camels, motorcycles and donkey carts, all covered in dust, for the paved road into town was washed out years ago. Mud-wall shops are filled with waist-high pyramids of red and yellow spices, piles of unboxed soap flakes, mountains of onions and — usually in the back — heavy bags of opium.

Turbaned men, their Kalashnikov assault rifles often within arm's reach, own the town. The few women to be seen are covered in ghostlike, head-to-toe *burqas*.

The opium gum in his bag was the product of enormous labor, said Amin, a poppy farmer as well as poppy merchant. The seeds are planted in the early winter and tended and watered until they flower in late spring. After they flower, an egg-size capsule forms at the top of the plant, with the opium sealed inside.

To harvest it, farmers scar the capsule in the morning and return later to collect the gum that seeps out. It takes the paste from hundreds of poppies to make an 18-pound bag.

The price, Amin concluded after completing a complicated conversion from Afghan to Iranian to American currency, was about $2,000. (Once refined into heroin, the street value would be thousands of times more.)

According to Amin, there has always been a small opium market in the area. Many Afghans use opium to kill pain and sometimes to mask the gnawing ache of hunger.

Amin started in the business 15 years ago after graduating from a German-sponsored technical school in Kandahar. The war was underway, and there was no other work for him, he said, so he came back to Sangin to grow and sell opium.

Because selling opium had long been illegal in Afghanistan, there were only a few opium merchants then, but a communist revolution in the late 1970s, followed by the 1979 Soviet invasion and a savage civil war, made normal farming and business impossible.

By all accounts, the poppy crop began to expand in the mid-1980s, after many Afghan farmers fled to Pakistan and the land was left to *mujaheddin* fighters and others who lived outside the law.

After the Russians left in 1989 and the Afghan communist government fell in 1992, farmers began returning to the Helmand River Valley. They found leveled villages, damaged canals, virtually impassable roads, and millions of land mines.

The traditional farm-to-market patterns were difficult or impossible to resume — except for poppies.

"Poppies are a very good crop, because they bring a high price and go easily to market," Amin said. "Nothing spoils on the way."

Growing poppies need a steady water supply, and the remains of the valley's irrigation effort have provided [illegible]. The 300-foot-high, American-built Kajaki dam, up river from Sangin, can still control spring floods and ensure a constant flow of water. Downstream from Sangin, the American-dug, 70-mile Boghra and Darweshan canals are badly silted and have damaged gate-

From the Editor:

We're starting the 25th year of our association with this publication; we've learned a lot & enjoyed it. We hope you have, too, & since it is renewal time for most of you, we hope you will want to continue receiving the FORUM. A form is enclosed.

Our purpose continues to be to provide readers with as much information about Afghanistan as comes to our attention. However, we rarely vouch for its veracity & we take no sides. Since news & propaganda are often interchangeable, we urge you always to consider the source which is usually given at the end of the article. We receive no funding, except for subscriptions, no salaries, no expense accounts. All the subscription money goes for paper, printing & postage. We depend upon our readers to send us information of all kinds as long as it has some relevance to Afghanistan. Since we are not yet on the Net, we appreciate the gems that come from cyberspace as well as those from real space. We spell names the way they appeared in the article cited so don't blame the proofreader!

This issue contains quite a few items that didn't fit into the last issue; the next issue will have some that didn't fit into this one. Having too much material makes editors happy & this one thanks all of you who sent goodies. Please continue; The deadline for the next issue is April 30, which means the next issue should be out mid-May.

We received the Taleban paper on a computer disk. Great! But we find that outsider's disks are treated like lepers. Instead of NIMBY (not in my back yard) it's NIMCP (not in my computer please). We'll keep you posted.

We've been told that there is a board game based on the Afghan War on sale in game stores. Has anyone seen it or played it?

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

RUSSIAN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA (a book about Ahmad Shah Masood & Russia) by Bruce Richardson, published in English & Dari by the Afghanistan Mirror. To order, call (909) 626-8314.

THE 'ANCIENT SUPREMACY' - BUKHARA, AFGHANISTAN & THE BATTLE FOR BALKH, 1731-1901 by Jonathan Lee, Leiden, NY, E.J. Brill. 1996. (Vol. 15 of Islamic History & civilization.) 695 pp. Maps, plates, plans.

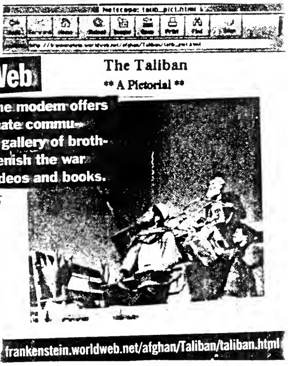
"Afghanistan & Central Asia: Mirrors & Models" by Ralph Magnus & Eden Naby in ASIAN SURVEY, Vol. XXXV, #7, July, 1995.

HEROES OF THE AGE: MORAL FAULTLINES ON THE AFGHAN FRONTIER by D.B. Edwards, University of California Press, Berkeley/LA/London, 1996. 295 pp.

WEBSITES

Guerrillas on the Web

For today's guerrilla, the modem offers the best means to disseminate communiqués, show off a pictorial gallery of brothers-in-arms—and even replenish the war chest by selling T shirts, videos and books.



TIME 1/13/97

The Pakistani English-Language Newspaper DAWN frequently has stories about Afghanistan.

http://www.xiber. com/dawn/

The new address for Afghan News Service:

http://www.afgnews.gnet.com/

The Afghan News Service is constructing a number of new cultural links, including a photo archive, Hotels - Afghanistan, Afghan white pages & the Great Game homepage.

SEARCHING FOR SALEEM: AN AFGHAN WOMAN'S ODYSSEY by F. Ganhari, Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London, 1996. 254 pp., illus., maps. $35.

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER January 19, 1997

ways but still irrigate thousands of acres that would otherwise be desert.

"As long as it is allowed, there will be many poppies in Helmand," Amin said.

Although men like Amin consider growing opium poppies to be little different from growing wheat, they know that opium is turned into heroin and that many Western governments want their business stopped. Given a good alternative, many Afghan poppy merchants and farmers say they would surely switch.

But, for now, they are sticking with the biggest cash crop they have ever had. In fact, poppy farmers the length of the Helmand River Valley say they planted more poppy this year than last.

Their reason?

"We have heard Taliban may ban the poppy in the future," Amin said, "so we have to make our business now."

■

American engineers and water experts first came to the Helmand River Valley some 50 years ago, hoping to turn it into an Asian Tennessee Valley. The project was the cornerstone of American aid to Afghanistan, then a nonaligned, strategically located country.

It took a vast effort — hundreds of American contractors and advisers, millions of dollars and the best American heavy equipment — to irrigate the valley. Today, in a sprawiing supply depot filled with massive Ingersoll cranes, Thompson drilling machines, dozens of earthmovers, and an entire machine-tool shop to fix it all, the remains of that effort form a surreal junkyard several miles outside the American-built city of Lashkar Gah.

Rusted, cannibalized for parts, sometimes almost skeletal, most of the hundreds of pieces of equipment have gone unused for nearly 20 years. A ragtag group of Taliban soldiers — some mere teenagers but all carrying Kalashnikovs — guards the depot's entrance.

The soldiers know that the United States supplied the equipment, and they say they hope the Americans will come back to fix it all. (Taliban leaders are especially eager for the United States to repair the big Westinghouse generators at the Kajaki dam so that it can once again supply power to Kandahar.)

The young Talibs offered a demonstration. One placed a stone amid some earthmovers and, one by one, the young men knelt down, took aim, and fired their weapons. The bullets kicked up dust and ricocheted off the machinery until one man's bullets finally knocked over the stone. The Talibs raised their guns and cheered.

The role of the Taliban in the opium trade is sensitive. Although Islam forbids the growing, trafficking or use of narcotics, the Taliban claims to be establishing a pure Islamic state in Afghanistan.

The Taliban government in Kabul has a Department for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice. Its acting director, Mullah Enayatullah Baligh, insists that the Taliban has begun a major crackdown on the opium trade, but American officials who follow the crop are skeptical. Opium poppies now cover almost twice as many acres in Afghanistan as in 1994, when the Taliban took control of the poppy areas.

Taliban officials also claimed late last year to have closed down several labs that processed the opium into heroin in southern Afghanistan. American officials say there is no evidence that the labs were destroyed.

While Afghan opium has become a big business and involves powerful traffickers, narcotics officials say, the Taliban could substantially reduce the poppy crop. Known for its severe punishments — such as severing the hands of thieves or stoning adulterers to death — the Taliban banned hashish growing and smoking several years ago. Afghans say hashish can hardly be found anymore.

But there has been no similar campaign against opium poppies, certainly not in the lower Helmand River Valley village of Nad-i-Ali, which has a distinctly American origin. The United States not only created the irrigation system that turned the area from desert to farmland but also built mud-and-brick living compounds and planted trees and bushes to hold the soil.

Today, the road to Nad-i-Ali leads to a small fortress flying a Taliban flag. The parking lot outside is thick with Taliban vehicles. Directly across the road lies a large field of inch-high poppy leaves.

The Boghra canal is badly silted and its gateway damaged. Still, it helps irrigate thousands of acres that would otherwise be desert.

Effort on to get farmers to switch

KAJAKI, Afghanistan — The village khan was interested but not yet convinced.

"If you plant fruit trees, if you plant black cumin, you can make more money than with poppies," silver-haired Abdul Wahid told the khan, or village leader.

Another dozen village men listening intently as they sat, cross-legged, in the dim lantern glow of the khan's guest room.

"Once they see your success, all the farmers will follow you," Wahid promised.

That is the message — and the hope — of a growing crew of American-sponsored Afghans, including Wahid, whose job is to visit the poppy fields of Afghanistan and persuade farmers to switch crops.

The effort is a drop in the bucket right now — only a handful of farm-extension workers urging thousands of farmers to plant new varieties of high-quality wheat, apricots or saffron instead of opium poppies — but the program is growing and can claim modest success.

And when it comes to combating the spread of opium-poppy cultivation, this is the only official program the United States has.

Operated by Mercy Corps International (MCI), which is based in Portland, Ore., with funds from the State Department's Narcotics Affairs Section, the crop-substitution program is working well enough that American officials in Pakistan believe it should be substantially expanded. The program has a $250,000 annual budget, which officials hope to at least double.

The money pays for plants, seeds and fertilizers for the farmers and also pays the salaries of men such as Wahid, who was trained by Americans in the 1950s for the Helmand River project. If more money is approved, the project could expand to include the repair of some of the area's American-built canals.

"We're under no illusions that we can eradicate all poppy growing through this program," said Thomas Brown, director of the MCI program, based in Quetta, Pakistan. "That would require an intensive campaign by the government.

"But, in the long term, we think we can convince many farmers to change. Afghans are smart farmers, and as the country is rebuilt, they'll realize they can make more money from other crops. Gradually, they'll see it's in their self-interest and shift out of poppies."

— *Marc Kaufman*

The Philadelphia Inquirer 1/19/97

Drugs and Terror in Afghanistan

Lally Weymouth

While the United States tries to decide whether it needs to send troops to Zaire to deal with the crisis there, the Clinton administration is ignoring a far more serious threat to U.S. interests in a distant but unmistakably important country: Afghanistan.

Despite the best efforts of the ranking State Department official responsible for the region, Robin Raphel, no Cabinet-level officer seems to have much interest in the fact that an Islamic fundamentalist group is fighting to take power in a country that, after more than 15 years of rule by Moscow and its local puppets, has become a world leader in heroin exports. Even the news that Afghanistan has permitted the establishment of training camps for terrorists—some of the Islamists who tried to blow up the World Trade Center gained their expertise on Afghan soil—has failed to spark outrage among U.S. policy elites.

Stability in Afghanistan is important to the United States for a number of reasons. A U.S. oil multinational is seeking to build two piplelines—one for natural gas, the other for oil—that would run from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. These pipelines would create a safer and more secure route for American oil companies, allowing them to avoid the dangers of the Persian Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz as well as the possible need to ship oil across Iran.

When Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan, Washington, with the help of Pakistan, gave covert assistance to Afghan guerrillas who were fighting to free their country from communism. But when Moscow withdrew its forces in 1989—a watershed event in the demise of international communism—the United States lost interest in the country.

After the Soviets left, Najibullah, a KGB-affiliated Soviet client, stayed on as president until 1992. Then, rebel warlords began a civil war, and chaos quickly followed. In towns such as Kandahar, lawlessness became so widespread that it manifested itself in the abduction of women.

In 1994 a group of Pashtun students known as the Taliban, who had studied at religious schools in Pakistan, took over Kandahar, allegedly with Pakistani support. The Taliban claimed multiple goals: freeing Afghanistan from various militias, bringing peace and security to the country and introducing strict Islamic laws.

They succeeded in bringing law and order to Kandahar, but they also came with what one U.S. official calls "crackpot ideas." Social reactionaries, the Taliban announced that women could not appear in public unless they were accompanied by male relatives. Nor were girls allowed to attend school. (This represented a difficulty in a country in which there were so many widows from the recent war.) The Taliban hung television sets from flagpoles—a symbolic attempt to rid society of Western cultural symbols.

The seizure of Kandahar was the start of the Taliban's extraordinarily quick rise to power. The students started to move from town to town, holding copies of the Koran above their heads and carrying white flags. Small cities fell virtually without a fight. Many commanders ran with [illegible] putting up a struggle; the few who remained were hanged. In each place the Taliban set down the usual rules: Women were not to work or go to school. They could appear in public only if they were covered from head to toe. Men were compelled to grow beards and wear turbans. Movie theaters were forced to close their doors—even the sport of volleyball was banned.

But when it comes to the cultivation of opium poppies and the manufacture of opium, the Taliban are decidedly permissive. They've reportedly allowed processing laboratories to be moved into Afghanistan from Pakistan. Indeed, according to a high-ranking U.S. official, the Taliban are directly involved in drug trafficking.

Observing the success of the Taliban, Tehran became concerned that the radical Islamists might stir up the Baluchs who live along Iran's border, thereby destabilizing Tehran's regime. Russia, too, feared that the Taliban was growing strong too quickly. Both neighbor countries began supporting the Tajik elements in Kabul—namely, the former president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and his defense minister, Ahmed Shah Massoud, a well-known warlord.

The Taliban, however, are well armed. They took possession of significant quantities of Soviet arms when various towns surrendered.

As for Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, U.S. intelligence predicted that the Tajik forces would be able to hold the city. But this assessment proved faulty. Rabbani and Massoud had been unpopular in Kabul and in the end retreated from the capital. The Taliban took the city last September and publicly executed Najibullah.

Since the takeover of Kabul, Tajik political leaders have forged an alliance with Uzbeki Gen. Abdurrashid Dostum, who holds sway in significant parts [illegible] Afghanistan. Together, they have been locked in battle with the Taliban, but neither side appears likely to emerge victorious.

This week at the United Nations, representatives from 18 nations gathered to try to find a solution to the bloodshed in Afghanistan. No Afghans took part, but the United States, Pakistan, India, Russia and Iran were there.

The administration is wise to support the United Nations' cease-fire efforts and the goal of creating a broad-based government in Kabul. If the Taliban is serious about good relations with the United States, it needs to enter into dialogue with its adversaries, demonstrate a willingness to destroy the terror camps and act firmly against opium cultivation.

As things stand, the administration lacks a clear strategy for Afghanistan. America's future oil supply may well lie in Central Asia, and Afghanistan could play a key role in removing Iran's chokehold on the oil in question.

All in all, this is a situation that requires high-level diplomatic skills and Washington's sustained attention.

THE WASHINGTON POST

NOVEMBER 2[illegible]

Afghanistan News Service

1/10/97

A REPORTER FOR DAWN (an English Language Pakistani newspaper) TALKS WITH TALIBAN

"We do not want our children to be spoiled, corrupted and made immoral by modern education, that is why we give them only religious education, and that, too, only in Arabic or in our native languages. This education has made us and our new generation a force to be reckoned with," declared Maulana Abdurrahman Zahid, muhtamim of the Taliban, in the NWFP.

Like others, I have always wondered at the sudden emergence of Taliban on the political or rather battle scene of Afghanistan, winning sweeping victories right and left. A few months back, just before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, I had to go to Peshawar. There, through my local taxi driver, I came to know about some madrassahs in Peshawar, belonging to the Taliban. I also heard about Maulana Azizullah Nuristani and Maulana Abdurrahman Zahid running such madrassahs.

The driver took me to a small fortress-like building on a main road, with an armed guard standing at the main gate. As soon as I approached the building, the guard came forward wielding his gun. I asked him to let me see Maulana Abdurrahman Zahid, but he answered that the Maulana was not in: "we are on holidays." I told him that I had come a long way and was very interested in these madrassahs, I requested him to let me see the classrooms and library. Either it was my burqa or, probably, the fact that they had never known a woman, with or without burqa, showing interest in their institution, that he allowed me to come in.

He volunteered the information that it was a Taliban madrassah, catering to Afghans only. He also told me that at that moment there were two war-wounded Afghans awaiting to move to the Taliban centre in Hayatabad, where they had better medical facilities. During my round of the building, I saw two young Afghans with bandages, lying on beds in a back-room. They refused to talk to me and seeing a camera in my hand they warned me not to take their picture. I asked the guard if I could take pictures of the empty classrooms, he agreed.

The madrassah's rooms were being used as classrooms-cum-bedrooms with locally-made bunkbeds. When I was coming out, I saw some resident students, ages 10 to 20, on the ground floor, waving at me. The guard did not allow me to talk to them either, but permitted me to take their pictures from a distance. On an impulse, he himself posed for me in his domain, the guardroom.

The next day I went there again to meet Maulana Zahid. He came to see me in the waiting room, with a few of his colleagues. He confirmed that his was a madrassah for Taliban in the making. "We are refugees not having facilities like we would have in our own country under normal circumstances. We are trying to prepare our children to face our peculiar conditions and to prepare them to get our country liberated from the hands of warlords, agents of other interfering countries."

He said that usually they taught the children Fiqh, Hadiths and the basics of Islam, and in their native languages only. But at the moment, they were teaching solely about Jihad, as that was what they would need to know more of, for a long time to come.

"Presently our madrassahs are operating like military academies. We have programmes of training in our madrasahs, which prepare our children for battlefields. For practical training, we take them to the tribal areas near the border. Our main communication centre is in Hayatabad, working as a liaison office between our people in Pakistan and Afghanistan. But, once our Jihad has achieved its objective, we will revert to normal religious studies in our madrassahs in our own country. Most of the Talibans fighting in Afghanistan were hastily trained in Afghanistan, transformed suddenly from students of religion to warriors, but the new generation, trained more comprehensively during the last few years, in Pakistan is more successful."

Maulana Zahid informed me that two members of the Taliban Shura, Maulana Saifurrahman and Maulana Abdurrahman, were shortly going to Karachi and would be staying at Sohrab Goth, where I could meet them with his reference for further information regarding the Taliban and their mission.

The next week in Karachi, I went to meet the Shura members. I had to make an appointment on the phone with Maulana Qasim, the Karachi muhtamim of Taliban, to meet the visiting leaders. I went to the said Mosque at Sohrab Goth at the prearranged time. The whole area looked alien, a no-man's land, an Afghan basti, very commonly seen in Peshawar and Quetta, but very rare in Karachi. In fact, I think that is the only one in Karachi. I was taken to a house adjacent to the mosque, belonging to Maulana Qasim.

The two Taliban leaders came in the room with their host and some guards. After saying "Assalam-o-alaikum", they recited Bismillah.. and then the very first thing they said was, "If our brother Maulana Zahid had not recommended that we meet you and, had you not been wearing the hijab , you would not have been able to set your feet in this area."

I was taken aback. I wanted to yell, "this is my country, my Pakistan, who are you to tell me where I go and how to go?" But, I realised in a split-second that, although unofficial, it was their territory at the moment and nobody would ever be able to find out where I'd vanished or was buried.

About their organisation, they said that the Taliban were not something new. "We are students of religious schools; we have fought shoulder to shoulder with all the present Afghan warlords against the Russians to liberate our country, to crush the invaders and we did succeed in ousting the Superpower. But after that, when our leaders started fighting each other to rule the country, we disassociated ourselves from them and we are their sworn enemy now. We will crush them, we will not let a single person rule over us, we will form an Islamic government. These leaders are not Muslims in the true sense of the word, they are foreign agents, they are against Islam, they are not Mujahideen. After the ouster of Russia, they have looted our own people, they were taking money and valuables from refugees in order to let them cross the border to Pakistan. The law of jungle was being applied in our country."

They denied that any Pakistani could ever be involved in their organisation. They said "it is our internal affair and we will settle it. Besides, Pakistan has also betrayed us, the Afghan masses, by helping the so-called Mujahideen." Replying to my question why were they in Karachi, they said, "we are preparing a big offensive, and we need funds for that. We are collecting whatever we can from our supporters here or anywhere in the world. It is all for Islam, not for ourselves." They said Saudi Arabia was the biggest source of their funds.

I asked them what they planned to do now that they had conquered Kabul. They answered that they would implement the Shariah laws with full force. They said that women of Kabul were very liberated since the days of Zahir Shah. "They need taming vigorously. We will ask these women once to 'behave' according to Islamic teachings. If they do not, we will teach them a lesson, a lesson that will be remembered for generations to come."

What will be their next task after converting Afghanistan? "We will go to Kashmir" he answered. "Why Kashmir?"I asked. "We will go there to help our Muslim brothers to get rid of foreign rule. If the Kashmiris were fighting each other, we would keep out of their tussle. That is not the case yet, they need help and we will help them as soldiers of Islam." The Maghrib Azan could be heard now, all of the 'congregation' stood up and left for the mosque.

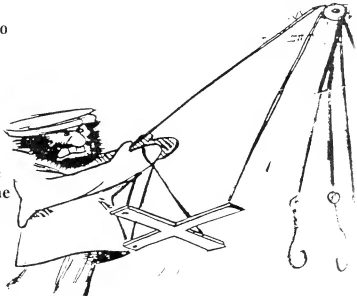
I left the area wondering whether to sympathise with the women of Kabul, or the Kashmiris, or my country for being entangled in others' dilemma, or, to be happy with so many 'soldiers of Islam', springing up from the poppy fields of Afghanistan. - DAWN

The Two Faces of Afghanistan

By Paul Watson - in Afghanistan

TORONTO STAR 1/1/97

PANJSHIR VALLEY, Afghanistan - **THE ONLY LAND** route through the strategic Panjshir Valley runs along a narrow dirt track that has thwarted conquerors for centuries. Ahmad Shah Massoud won his honored title, the Lion of Panjshir, and his place in Afghanistan's long history of bloodletting, by making the valley a death trap for Soviet troops in the 1980s. It is his last stronghold once again, this time in the civil war against Taleban soldiers who drove Massoud's forces from Kabul in the fall. Massoud retreated to the turf he knows better than any of the country's warlords and where his ethnic support is strongest. He will do anything, it seems, to keep the Panjshir.



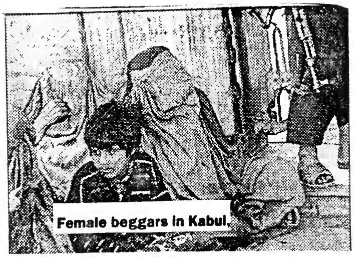
As Taleban soldiers closed in at the beginning of September, Massoud was so close to losing his last refuge that he ordered the road blown up to create a barrier of mountain rubble. It worked, and the Taleban's advance has been stalled for weeks, but Afghanistan's legendary traders aren't so easily discouraged.

They get through with pack horses, donkeys and wheelbarrows. Or they drive their cars and trucks up to the pile of shattered boulders at the river's edge to be lifted over the barrier by crane. It takes just a few minutes for a yelling team of workers to run logs through the opened side windows and then attach heavy steel hooks. The crane operator reels in the cable and lifts the vehicle by the roof, dangling it over the Panjshir River's rapids and gently lowering it on to the open road. There's a hefty toll for the service, about $25 (U.S.) for each passage over the debris. By now, Afghans are used to a few profiting handsomely from Afghanistan's ruin.

And so the war goes on.

The Taleban, an army of Muslim extremists determined to enforce strict adherence to their code of proper conduct, have had to do some improvising of their own. On the main road out of Kabul toward the Pakistan border, mini-buses, trucks, taxis and curtained highway coaches join a long line waiting for security clearance at a roadblock. Everyone is carefully checked to ensure women are properly covered, men have beards and no one is carrying weapons or other contraband such as videos of Hollywood movies, or any film for that matter.

Women not only have to hide every inch of themselves but their shoes in public, they're also prohibited from working alongside men in all but a few exceptional cases. So there were no women available to search other women arriving at the checkpoint. And the Taleban certainly couldn't allow soldiers to frisk women no matter how well shrouded. The solution was to choose one of the local boys who hang out selling cigarettes and snacks to people stuck in the lineup and have him conduct the search. The boy doing it this morning was about 10, too young to see anything sexual in the act of patting down strange women, according to the Taleban. But they decided he was old enough to know the feel of a concealed weapon or videotape beneath a woman's veiled gown.



Female beggars in Kabul.

When my taxi reached the roadblock, the driver rooted around under his seat and in the glove compartment to make sure he found every battered cassette tape in the car. The Taleban have banned all recorded music as well as movies, so the taxi driver with tapes of Afghan musicians looked like a nervous drug addict trying to stash his dope at a border crossing. He quickly wrapped the tapes in a dirty rag, lifted the centre armrest to his right and then stuffed the contraband deep inside it. The Taleban soldiers searched, but didn't find the music. Hours later, when the taxi driver was less than a minute into no-man's land and just about to enter Massoud's territory, he pulled out the cassettes, popped one into the deck and celebrated another small victory over the Taleban.

In Jabal-Saraj, Massoud's base north of Kabul, women are technically free to leave their homes without wearing the veiled chadarris required by Taleban decree in its areas. But very few women walk outside without their chadarris on because it's a rural area and tradition is just as strict as Taleban law when it comes to females.

To find a city even remotely as liberal as Kabul once was, you have to travel almost as far north as the border with Uzbekistan, to the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Mazar is the rear base for Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, a key leader of the deposed government's shaky alliance against the Taleban, which seized Kabul just over three months ago. It's not only common to see women's faces in the streets of Mazar, but many are wearing makeup - it's a shock after a two-week journey through the rest of Afghanistan.

On a Friday afternoon, when every Afghan man in Kabul must be in the mosque or face severe punishment as an infidel, Mazar's restaurants are full of men lounging around. At the Nazar Ga restaurant, a popular spot for kebabs and tea, few of the metal chairs are empty and every man's eyes are fixed on the color TV set mounted above a cassette deck near the front door. Mazar, roughly 400 kilometres from Kabul as the crow flies, is as much a part of Afghanistan as the capital is. Yet the Nazar Ga's customers would be risking their lives if they did in Kabul what they are doing on this Sabbath: staring at a television. - Toronto Star

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Afghan fighters want Allah or nothing

By Michael A. Lev
Chicago Tribune

KABUL, Afghanistan – On the front just outsi Kabul, where mortar fire is exchanged dail in Afghanistan's latest civil war. bearded commander said what I lamic soldiers have been saying here for two decades.

"It's victory or martyrdom: In victory we bring Islamic rule to Afghanistan. In martyrdom we g to paradise." Mulawi Khan Mohmad declared as 30 of his scruffy militiamen sat listening intently Kalashnikov rifles by their sides.

In the middle of his forehead, just below his turban, is a cylindı cal pockmark. It is a bullet wour he suffered during the long guerr la war against the former Soviet Union.

The injury is one visible scar o many in Afghanistan from a holy war that will not end.

From 1979 to 1992, bands of Is lamic rebels known as mujahedi fought and outlasted the Soviets. Then the Muslim warriors turne on each other, with at least five factions, including the commanc er's Taliban movement, destroyı what was left of the country.

Kabul was mostly spared the S viet onslaught. But it has been almost completely obliterated by t factional fighting that followed, killing 45,000 civilians and turnir every prominent building into a bullet-scarred disaster.

children whose parents were killed in the war wait for lunch to be served at an orphanage on the outskirts of Kabul.

Children playing in their hor have been blown up by mi placed by adversaries as fr lines shifted through the city. lief workers say much of Kabul pends on food aid or goes hun without it.

The windows in most gove ment offices have been blown (and workers shuffle papers as early winter Siberian wind ho past their desks.

In addition to the fighting, Ka is experiencing a new confl What some warriors call true lam, the United Nations says is abuse of human rights.

After beating back a fragile alition of rivals, the Taliban m ment has conquered two-third Afghanistan. Where it rules, Taliban imposes its strict interpretation of Islamic law, an interpretation other Muslims challenge.

In Kabul, which the Taliban took in late September, women are banned from schools and work and are required to hide behind full-length veils on the streets. Music and movies are prohibited. Men must grow beards.

Taliban warriors with rifles harass and beat civilians who don't rush to the mosque for prayers and in some cases string chains across roads to prevent movement at prayer time. When the militiamen search houses, mainly for arms, they smash any musical instrument they find.

Accustomed to a liberal city by Islamic standards, Kabul residents are bridling under the restrictions of what many consider a religious police state.

"These people are very narrow-minded," said Rahman Rehmani, a Kabul businessman who runs a currency exchange office. "I like to pray, but I don't want to be told I have to do it."

Still, Rehmani said he was so tired of war that he accepts the Taliban occupation.

"I'd have been glad if even a dog came to power if he brought peace," he said.

Rehmani's ambivalence reflects a wide debate among residents and relief agencies in Kabul over whether the Taliban's rule is an improvement over the previous carnage and chaos.

Taliban soldiers have stopped the fighting in Kabul and disarmed opponents, restored some electricity, reduced highway banditry and made efforts to respect property rights.

Still, many people are incensed at the ban on work and school for women. Taliban soldiers, who run checkpoints and roam through the city, have been so threatening and suspicious that some women have not left their homes for months.

"This is a new brand of extremism," said Terry P. Pitzner, who heads the Kabul office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Iran is moderate by comparison."

Pitzner said aid officials were deeply concerned about how the ban was affecting poor widows and children. He said they cannot earn money for food and relief agencies are having a tougher time reaching out to victims because the agencies can no longer employ local women.

"If we can't reach the most vulnerable population, what is going to happen to them?" Pitzner said. "We're looking at illness and catastrophe."

War a way of life for Afghans

By David Turnley
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

In Afghanistan, curfew starts at nightfall.

Taliban soldiers arrest and beat anyone who hasn't retired to a home or bunker for the night. The wakeup call the following morning will be just as forceful: The earth-shaking thuds from bomb attacks on Kabul launched from the mountains about 19 miles north of the city.

War in this country is a way of life. It surrounds you: bombed-out buildings; amputees hobbling through the rubble, their limbs lost to land mines; turbaned and bearded Taliban fighters, who have a reputation for being among the fiercest in the world, roaming the city sporting bandoliers and Kalishnikov firearms.

Survival in this society places a premium on innovation. There is no infrastructure to speak of. Electricity is rare. The water is undrinkable. There is virtually no industry, and when food can be found, it is too expensive to purchase.

For Afghans, this has been a way of life for most of the past two decades. In fact, many voice a growing concern that civil war in Afghanistan is no longer uniquely a function of political, social and economic conflict, but a cultural tradition.

THE DENVER POST
January 16, 1997

Knight-Ridder / David C. Turnley

Above, a shrouded Afghan woman and her daughter hurry through the rubble in Kabul's Jadah Maywand district, a target of bombs and artillery for most of the last 10 years.

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20 to 25 people daily die in Afghan mine mishaps

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: A survey says that only in war-torn Afghanistan, where more than 10 million mine had been planned, 20 to 25 people are killed or maimed daily in mine related incidents.

Sayed Aqa, the chairman of Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines, in a statement reminded the international community of the disastrous situation caused by the landmines in Afghanistan and called on donor countries to contribute their assistance to demining and other reconstruction projects in Afghanistan which not only halted safe repatriation of the Afghan refugees but also slowed down or prohibited reconstruction process in the war devastated country.

The Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL), a national forum established to support the International Campaign to ban Landmines, asked the warring factions in Afghanistan to refrain from using landmines and to promote awareness about the mine problem in Afghanistan.

News
(Pakistan)
1/22

A TOURIST IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

The author, Scott Levi, is a Ph.D. candidate in the History Dept. of the Univ. of Wisconsin at Madison. He is currently doing research in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He spent a long weekend in Mazar-i-Sharif & Balkh in mid-November, 1996.

Travelling to Afghanistan has been an aspiration of mine since I was in Peshawar in 1992 & got my first taste of Afghan culture. At that time, the closest I was allowed to actually crossing into Afghanistan was standing in the Khyber Pass & looking at the "forbidden land' ahead of me. There is nothing more effective than telling someone that they can't do something to make them desire it that much more. So when I found out that it is possible to travel to Afghanistan from Uzbekistan, where I am currently living, I jumped at the chance. I got up early on a Friday morning, collected my travel gear, and met a friend near the Hamid Olimjon subway station in Tashkent. The station is located between my apartment & the airport & my friend has access to a car & driver. Her driver took us to the airport where we had arranged to meet two other friends. The flight to Termiz was beautiful as we flew in a little 'Yak-40' airplane over stunning mountain ranges across southern Uzbekistan

We arrived in Termiz although we had no idea what to expect once we left the plane. We hoped to meet up with friends who had been in Afghanistan for the previous few days & had planned to meet us at the Termiz airport. They had arrived much earlier but were having ticket difficulties so were still there when we arrived. They also happened to have retained their driver so half an hour later we were on our way to the border. It is only about 15 kilometers from Termiz, but we had to run a couple of errands first. We went to the Uzbekistan Airways office and bought return tickets from Termiz to Tashkent for Monday morning (the 10:05 flight, a whopping $15 each), bought gas for the car and made a few phone calls to line up our visas. We made it to the border and after an hour or so wait the man who was to give us our visas arrived. Apparently he had taken off for one of those long lunches that people over here are famous for & we interrupted him after just a 2-hour lunch break. After he looked at our documents & talked to our driver we got our visas. Then he remembered that he had forgotten to ask for a bribe so as we were going through customs he told someone that we owed him $30 each for the visas. Our friends had told us specifically that the visas were free, as had our driver and the customs agent. It took some fast talking & faster walking but we got away without paying.

We got back into our car & headed on through the desert to Mazar-i-Sharif, about an hour and a half south of the border In some areas half the road or better was given to sand dunes &, except for the towering northern face of the Shadian range of the Hindu Kush mountains dominating the horizon, all we could see was sand & brush. Periodically dotting the landscape were the carcasses of long destroyed Soviet tanks which reminded us that even though the current fighting in Afghanistan is further south in & around the Panjshir Valley, Kabul & Herat, the Afghan people have suffered from incessant warfare for almost 20 years.

There was very little traffic on the road & what there was generally made way for us. We were in a very nice car, which seems to have considerably facilitated travel. Unfortunately it also tells people on the side of the road that the passengers probably have money to spare. As we were driving into town we passed an enormous compound dedicated to assisting some of the thousands of war-injured Afghans, & say a dozen or so children shoveling dirt into the road. As we approached the children would stop shoveling, step into the road, & give an extremely exaggerated salute complete with a sideways leg kick. It took a while before we figured out that they were trying to earn money from wealthy travellers (generally diplomats & aid workers) by filling some of the countless potholes with dirt from the side of the road. At this time road maintenance is not one of Afghanistan's priorities.

When we arrived in Mazar our eyes were glued to the windows looking at the people & the buildings. Our driver had made us shut the windows so nobody could see in & we drove through all the checkpoints without stopping. We went to the money-changing bazaar & our driver collected some money from all of us, totaling $250, & went to change it into Afghanis - $1 = 25,000 Afs. He returned with stacks of bills which don't come in any larger denominations than Afs. 10,000. For a while there I was a multi-millionaire! Needless to say we were selective, but couldn't refuse to give a little to some of the hundreds of homeless, poor people inhabiting Mazar as refugees from the fighting further south. Many had lost limbs or been disfigured in other ways from gunshots or land mines.

Twenty years of fighting has had a terrible effect on many elements in Afghan society. Not only has it halted any kind of investment in a national infrastructure, such as road maintenance, communication networks, power & clean water supplies, but it has resulted in an entire generation of Afghan citizens who have experienced only the climate of war. The Afghan youth are almost all uneducated & even among adults, illiteracy is prevalent. According to the owner of the Mazar Hotel, a very interesting man with a masters degree in political science from Berkeley, the war has also caused hundreds of thousands of Afghans to flee their country; this includes the vast majority of Afghanistan's educated population. Even should a lasting peace be established, such a "brain drain'. especially when combined with the production of an uneducated generation, promises to severely hamper the rebuilding of the nation. This does not bode well for the future of Afghanistan.

Our next step was to find a hotel. Jamal wanted to take us to The Mazar, the nicest hotel in town at about $50/room/night. It seems to be where many of the journalists covering the war are staying. We decided to by-pass the luxury & go for something a bit more at the local level. Jamal took us to a place that was perfect. The hotel desk clerk showed us a room with 4 "beds" & a balcony & that was it. The "beds" consisted of a metal frame & a thick blanket over the loosest springs I had ever seen. To my surprise, covered with enough blankets it was kind of comfortable. The electricity supply was sporadic at best, but with a little ingenuity the holes at the top of the metal bed posts served as makeshift candle holders. We had a toilet in common with all of the other people staying on the floor (all Afghans) & our only water source, which was dry much of the time we were there, was a spout in the bathroom. For purposes of politemess I won't describe how disgusting the bathroom was. The room cost us 10,000 Afs. per night each (about 40¢). The people were very friendly & the place was safe as there was a watchman on every floor at all times. Best of all we were in the center of the city with a beautiful view of the Mazar from our balcony. The Mazar, from which the city takes its name, is a large sparkling blue building with intricately detailed tile work decorating its entire exterior. It dates from the 15th century & is said to be built on the tomb of Hazrat 'Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. In other words, this is a serious, serious place & we were staying about 200 meters from it. O.K., the bathroom was a little tough to take, but it was worth it.

One of the things I wanted to do while in Afghanistan was find & purchase another patu. These are woolen shawls available in a variety of colors (ivory, grey, brown, dark green) with embroidered borders & are usually worn by Afghan men. I bought one in Pakistan 4 years ago & love it so much that I wanted another. Also, I didn't have room in my luggage when I left home & I've been missing it terribly as the weather has been getting cold in Tashkent. After putting our stuff into the room, installing a latch on the door post & buying a new lock for the new latch, we went across the street to the bazaar. The first shop I saw was selling patus! We spent the next few hours walking around to acclimate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Brian, an anthropologist from Berkeley, was shocked by the incredible social difference between Afghanistan & Uzbekistan. They are physically separated by the Amu Darya (which one crosses on a metal-framed bridge ironically called 'Friendship Bridge' despite years of warfare between Afghans & the Soviet Union), but that does not begin to account for the cultural differences between the peoples of the 2 states. This was Brian's first taste of an Islamic/Asian culture outside of ex-Soviet Central Asia & he couldn't believe how vibrant & 'organic' the Afghan culture is. He concluded that when he returns to Asia to continue his fieldwork (he's leaving this week after 8 months in Kirghizstan & Uzbekistan), he will try to do his work in Afghanistan.

My interpretation of (northern) Afghanistan is that it is to a great extent defined by its location between South Asia. Central Asia, & to a lesser extent, Iran. The Central Asian influence is readily apparent in the considerable population of 'Uzbek-Afghans'. These people have certain similarities to the ethnic Afghans, most notably in the way they dress, but many have Mongolian features betraying their Central Asian heritage & they are generally bilingual in Uzbek & Farsi (NOT Tajik). I had a blast switching back & forth between languages with them. A Central Asian influence is also noticeable in Afghan cuisine, shashlik & pilau (not known by the Uzbek pronunciation 'plov') being staple foods of the population. The similarities between the Central Asian Uzbeks & the 'Uzbek Afghans' is something I found to be very complex & fascinating & worthy of much more attention than I was able to give it in a mere 3 or 4 days. Still, I couldn't help but reach the obvious conclusion that the contrast is due largely to the Soviet experience of the Central Asian Uzbek peoples. This is most apparent in that the Russian language, spoken widely throughout Central Asia, doesn't get one very far in Afghanistan.

The South Asian influence in Balkh & Mazar was apparent at the pop-culture level in such things as Hindi films & music, and also, happily, in the cuisine. Although many dishes were variants of traditional Central Asian cookery, the standard Turkic overabundance of grease & oil was not so prevalent in Afghan dishes which benefited instead from a healthy dose of Indian spices. We also met many Afghans who had traveled to or lived in Pakistan & knew at least some Urdu... The Iranian influence is primarily literary as the only books we saw in the bazaars were in Farsi & most were published in Iran. I saw a considerable supply of commercial goods from all 3 regions available in the bazaars of Mazar-i-Sharif.

I certainly don't want to imply that the Afghans are only a mediatory mix of external influences: above & beyond this the Afghans have their own traditions & culture & these are the most exciting elements in their identity. They appear to be a very proud people & maybe even a little ashamed of the terrible situation they are in & unable to get out of. I have never before been to a place where (obviously being a foreigner) so many people came up to me & politely ask if there was anything I needed or that they could do for me. If at that time there was, they seemed very pleased to help me with no expectation of a cash reward or anything. If there wasn't, they wished me well & went on their way. They were very hospitable & understanding. Much like the Bukharans I met a few weeks ago the Afghans were excited that we could speak with them in their own language & they were very inquisitive about the 'outside world.' This is unlike Tashkent where many people, including Uzbeks, don't understand why I don't speak fluent Russian & who couldn't give a hang about anything outside of the Tashkent city limits.

At about 6:00 p.m. we asked the neighborhood militia commander, who repeatedly invited us to stay with him & his family, where a good place was to have dinner. He directed us around the corner. The construction & style of the restaurant was a fantastic blend of South & Central Asian elements. In the back were big Turkic _char pais_ ('4-foot,' kind of like sitting on a squat, heavy-duty table with a hand-knotted carpet for a table cloth) for people to sit on. In the front were standard tables & chairs. Before we could even get our shoes off, customary when eating on a _char pai_, a waiter had already brought tea & bread. They had both Uzbek & Afghan bread & the food was wonderful: very tender, lean shashlik, Afghan soups, manti, & Afghan rice pilau. We loved the place, made a lot of friends there & went back for almost every meal we ate in Mazar. That's not to say that snacking at the street vendors wasn't just as much fun. They had a chickpea salad called _shornakhud_ that was out of this world! It is heated in a big vat of Indian ghee over a fire in a moveable cart, & for about 20c you get a heaping bowl of chickpeas with 3 different blends of spicy-hot seasonings & sauces. Other notable street food are the fresh fruit drinks that vendors make in juicing machines. I tried one made of pomegranates & another made with apples, bananas, walnuts & honey. Very tasty.

The city pretty much rolls up & goes to sleep at about 9 p.m. & there is a 10:00 curfew. We were asleep before 10 almost every night we were there & usually closer to 9. This facilitated getting up at 5 a.m. or so to get out & see the city come to life. Saturday morning we went to the Mazar to take pictures as the sun came up over the Hindu Kush. The marble floor was very cold on my feet as shoes are prohibited so I couldn't stay too long.

Saturday morning we spent walking from shop to shop looking at things, talking to people & trying a wide variety of different foods & teas. The city is roughly divided into bazaars devoted to certain kinds of goods. There was the patu/blanket/plastic goods bazaar in our neighborhood on the east side of the Mazar. Down the road & on the south side of the Mazar was the book bazaar & further down, the jewelry bazaar. Around the next corner to the west side of the Mazar was the carpet & antique bazaar. The new & used clothing bazaar was on the north side.

I ended up buying a fair amount of loot on Saturday. I found a good Farsi dictionary, a Farsi-English dictionary, a Farsi map of Afghanistan, Firdausi's Shah Namah, a copy of the Divan-i Hafiz, a collection of the works of Sa'adi, two small dictionaries & a patu. Periodically I had to dump stuff in the room & then head back out to refill my arms. On Sunday, I fell in love with & purchased a small 3' x 5' carpet; it's an interesting Turkmen-Afghan piece which seems to be made of good quality wool. What really struck me was the use of a pistachio dye in a few places in the design that gave a color I had never seen before.

When we returned to the Mazar on Saturday afternoon & walked around to the back of the building, I was stunned by the vision of hundreds of doves congregating around a small tree. Apparently feeding these doves is a tradition at the Mazar although I don't know what, if anything, it symbolizes or represents. People were all around feeding them, & the birds are so tame they eat from people's hands. In fact, as I found out first hand, they even sit on people's shoulders, arms & heads. I bought a large amount of bird seed & quickly won the favor of the flock. I believe I have a picture of birds sitting on my head eating some of the bird seed that my friend put in my hair. It took a while to get it all out, but if the picture comes out it will be worth it. It was a truly miraculous experience, but the greatest miracle is that I didn't get pooped on once!

Sunday morning we woke up & hired a taxi to take us to Balkh. I was surprised to find that such an important city in the historical sense is now nothing more than a medium-large village with some very interesting ruins. Balkh used to be a major stop along the trade routes between India & Central Asia. It could even be argued (as I frequently do) that Balkh marks the economic &, to some extent, cultural frontier between South Asia & Central Asia. Balkh is only about 12 km west of Mazar-i-Sharif, but they are separated by an enormous military fort in the middle of the road. We saw numerous tanks & a very well-armed militia around Mazar, but this fort was ready for battle. It stretched for some 3 km. in diameter & housed 30 or 40 tanks. Each of the 16 or so towers was armed with anti-aircraft guns & we drove right through the middle of it in our clunker of a taxi while General Dostam's troops were out training.

We drove through without even being stopped, a testament to the security of the region, & our taxi driver dropped us in the center of the village about 8 a.m. The stores were just opening & again we were dumfounded by the hospitality of the people. A man, probably in his late 20s, who runs a souvenir shop selling things that he finds in the ruins of the old city said that since we didn't know our way around, he'd like to show us. We walked to the historic walled city, which was populated for some 2500 years. Today the walls are caving in on themselves & this once vibrant cultural center was flat. I mean f-l-a-t, flat. According to our friend, it was largely deserted by the beginning of the 20th century & had served as a holdout for some anti-Soviet troops. This resulted in its complete destruction by the Soviets & he showed us ashes left over from where bombs hit & pools of battery acid left over from the

ORGANIZATIONS

AFGHAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION INT'L (AWAI)
P.O. Box 56032, Hayward, CA 94544.

The AWAI was formed in 1992 for the purpose of establishing & defending the basic rights of Afghan women. AWAI works in social & political areas, focusing on basic human needs, i.e., food & shelter, as well as health, educational & political needs of women in Afghanistan & abroad. Last year AWAI donated funds to CARE's Emergency Widow's Project in Kabul, opened a satellite branch in San Diego, sent representatives to a Congressional Hearing in Washington, D.C. on the Afghan war, gave funds to BAAR, held monthly sessions for older Afghan women to learn about their community & socialize, & began work on opening vocational centers to train widows to be self-sufficient in several Afghan cities. Rona Popal is the Executive Director. Other directors are Rahima Haya, Najia Hamid & Shahla Arsala. (E-mail address: Awai @Aol. Com) Donations are tax deductible.

HELP THE AFGHAN CHILDREN, INC., 4105 N. Fairfax Drive, #204, Arlington, VA 22203, was founded in 1993 for the sole purpose of helping the innocent children of Afghanistan. Its relief efforts provide food, clothing, shelter & medical aid to these children through its existing facilities & contacts within Afghanistan. Suraya Sadeed is the Director of this non-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible.

شــوال – ذو القعدة ١٤١٧
February - March 1997 ♓

حوت ١٣٧٥

شنبه Saturday	یکشنبه Sunday	دوشنبه Monday	سه شنبه Tuesday	چهارشنبه Wednesday	پنجشنبه Thursday	جمعه Friday
					20 ١ ١٣	21 ٢ ١٤
22 Washington's Birthday ٣ ○ ١٥	23 ٤ ١٦	24 ٥ ١٧	25 ٦ ١٨	26 ٧ ١٩	27 ٨ ٢٠	28 ٩ ٢١
1 March ١٠ ٢٢	2 ١١ ☾ ٢٣	3 ١٢ ٢٤	4 ١٣ ٢٥	5 ١٤ ٢٦	6 ١٥ ٢٧	7 ١٦ ٢٨
8 ١٧ ٢٩	9 ١٨ ● ٣٠	10 ١٩ ١	11 ٢٠ ٢	12 ٢١ ٣	13 ٢٢ ٤	14 ٢٣ ٥
15 ٢٤ ٦	16 ٢٥ ☽ ٧	17 ٢٦ ٨	18 ٢٧ ٩	19 ٢٨ ١٠	20 ٢٩ ١١	

PHYSIOTHERAPY & REHABILITATION SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN, 5707 First Street, Arlington, VA 22204, is a small NGO founded last year by Mary MacMakin, an American who has been involved in Afghanistan since the 1960s. PARSA works directly with needy people, especially widows, who have "fallen through the cracks" of the survey nets of the larger NGOs. Its aim is to find work for and/or develop skills so that these people can partly or wholly support themselves & their families. PARSA is in the process of getting its tax exemption in the US. Nancy Sloan Jenkins at the above address is the US representative as Ms. MacMakin is in Afghanistan.

Excerpts from the PARSA Charter...

›› The name of this organization is Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Support for Afghanistan (PARSA). It is an independent, non-government, non-profit, and non-political organization. It maintains close working relations with other organizations working in relief and rehabilitation in Afghanistan.

Goals and Objectives

The main purpose and objective of PARSA in 1996-7 are:

›› To find good work for widows to do at home in order to wholly or partially support their families.

›› To provide necessary items to widows in an emergency, within limits of PARSA's budget.

›› To cooperate and assist other NGOs with surveys, meetings, and plans to help rehabilitate Kabul and provide food security.

›› To help the process of repatriation of Afghan refugees.

›› To contribute to human resource development by conducting training courses.

›› To contribute to the economic development and stability of Kabul through income generation projects.

›› To set up a shop in Share Nau to sell items made by widows

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Taliban said that the election of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister of Pakistan would not affect Kabul's ties with Islamabad. Pakistan has not yet officially recognized the Taliban gov't. Sharif said he did not know if Pakistan had been supporting the Taliban.

AFGHAN DAILY NEWS, AFP 2/5

Soviet encampments. Within the walls there was little more to see than the old Bukharan & Hinduwan roads & the holes in the walls where the city gates used to be. One thing that is still maintained is the tomb of a few saints & poets. We hung out there & the chokidar made us tea & offered to make us lunch. We declined as it was obvious he didn't have much & we didn't want to put him out & we weren't sure how to pay him for it without insulting his hospitality.

We walked the distance across the old city, maybe a kilometer, through an absolute wasteland of rocks, sand & thousands of pieces of shattered glazed tile work from the buildings that used to fill the city walls. In the middle of the walled city. underground & barely noticeable except for a sinkhole exposing part of a wall, is, according to our friend, the remains of a castle from the 8th century. I have no idea if he is correct or not, but I can only begin to imagine the ancient buried archaeological remains within the walls of the old city. As we stared at the wall of this building from above the sinkhole, a snake slithered out of one hole in the ground & into another. We promptly moved on.

After spending 2 full hours in the old city we had forgotten that modern Balkh is an agricultural village. As we crested the site of the Hinduwan gate we stood at the entrance to the city & looked both ways, to the decimated inner city on one side & to the lush agricultural fields outside the city walls. We couldn't believe the difference between the brown wasteland behind us & the greenness of the farmland ahead of us. As we moved on we were even more surprised to find that the vibrant, green fields we saw from a distance were entirely comprised of marijuana plants growing between dry, brown cotton plants. We walked 50 meters through pot fields & a carrot garden to the gumbaz of the family of Jalal al-Din Rumi.

Then we walked back to the new city where we visited the Khojah Parsa mosque, which is being renovated, & the tombs of some poets & saints including the celebrated female poet Rabi'a Balkhi. By the time we finished lunch at the local "restaurant" it was almost 12:30 & we wanted to be back in Mazar-i-Sharif around 1. We had arranged for a taxi driver to come & pick us up, but of course he didn't show up. So we walked, with our friend, to the main road & eventually a taxi full of Afghans (I mean REALLY full - about 9, including the 2 sitting on the open trunk) went by. We stopped them & the driver agreed to drop them off & come back to pick us up on his way back to Mazar.

Shortly after we arrived in Mazar we walked over to the gov't offices to ask about possibly getting some assistance in taking a cab to the border the next day. They said not to worry & that we should just take a cab from Mazar to Hairatan, the last city in Afghanistan before the border. From there, they said we could take a local taxi across the border with no trouble at all. It was while we were in the gov't office that we met Zaid, the owner of the Mazar Hotel. He flipped when he heard one of us was a student at Berkeley & they reminisced about restaurants & neighborhoods in San Francisco. After an eternity of this we left & walked round for a few more hours.

Sunday evening, after some tea at our usual place, we walked down the road to the Mazar Hotel for dinner. Zaid had asked us to stop by & the thought of a clean bathroom was enough motivation for the kilometer walk. The hotel certainly isn't fancy, but it is comfortable, clean & has warm water (sometimes). Zaid arrived shortly after we did & we spent the rest of the evening talking to him. Before we could argue he had bought us dinner & offered to give us a room for the night, with hot running water, for free. Had we met him the day before we certainly would have taken him up on it but, as we were leaving at 6:30 the next morning, we decided against it. We thanked him profusely, walked back to the room & called it a night.

At 6 a.m. on Monday we were up & by 6:30 we were in a taxi heading toward the border. It was cold, rainy & muddy & a generally miserable day. We got to the border to find it was still closed at 8:00 & there was a long line of trucks waiting to go through. We met & were yelled at by an Afghan border guard. According to the representative of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in whose office we sat & drank tea for about

3 hours, the guard "was entirely without manners." That's a direct translation from the Farsi.

Our problem apparently developed when we got to the border & didn't have a car. We were told it would be no problem to take a taxi from Hairaton, but it was. Taxis were not allowed to cross the border & the only way for us to go was to hitch a ride with someone who had room in his car. They wouldn't let us walk across the border & they wouldn't let us split up into pairs & ride with any of the truckers crossing the border. Almost immediately a guy showed up with plenty of room. We asked him if he'd be willing to help us out. He said he would, but for $30 each. We told him to "get lost." The nasty border guard said that a bus would come at 10:30 & we could take that across, but that it would also cost $30 so we should just pay him & go now. That was such a bold - faced lie we told him to "get lost" & we walked into the border station. The Foreign Affairs representative confirmed our suspicions and said that there was a bus due at 10:30 but it cost $3, not $30. It wouldn't have mattered either way as we had tickets for the 10:05 a.m. flight to Tashkent, & a 10:30 bus wasn't going to be of any help. Besides, with the time it would take to process a bus full of people at the immigration posts, we would have been lucky to make it through by nightfall! We waited, & waited, & waited. 10:30 came & went & even the bus wasn't there. Finally an Iranian with a pickup truck showed up & we managed to shame him into helping the poor, broke foreign students. He only soaked us for $15. Speaking of soaked, it's hard to believe that we paid almost $4 each to sit in the open back of a pickup truck so that we could ride across a half-kilometer bridge in the cold rain. Fortunately, I had my patu on so I stayed reasonably dry. Still, it made for quite a sight as we passed over the Amu Darya, & the Uzbek guards on the other side got a good laugh.

The Uzbek side wasn't much easier to pass through. As is the case with all int'l borders of the ex-Soviet Union, it is controlled by Russia as part of the CIS agreements made after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those Russian border guards were difficult. ... After an other hour or so we made it through customs & immigration & finally arrived at the airport about 12:30, well after our flight & half an hour after the third of the 4 daily flights to Tashkent had left. The last flight was at 4:30 & it was our only hope of getting back to Tashkent on Monday. Needless to say, we spent a night in Termiz...

Mazar-i-Sharif centre of hectic diplomatic activity

From Rahimullah Yusufzai

PESHAWAR: In response to an invitation by Junbush-i-Milli Islami chief Gen Rasheed Dostam, a number of Afghan leaders were reaching Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan for crucial talks on the future of the country.

According to Gen Yousaf, a spokesman for Dostam, deposed president Burhanuddin Rabbani was still in Mazar-i-Sharif and former Herat governor Ismail Khan had also arrived there. He informed that Karim Khalili, head of the Shiite Hezb-i-Wahdat which controls Bamian province in central Afghanistan, had also reached Mazar-i-Sharif for consultations with other Afghan leaders.

General Yousaf said other Afghan leaders and groups, including the Taliban, were welcome to join talks aimed at resolving the grave problems confronting Afghanistan. He reiterated that Junbush-i-Milli Islami had no dispute with the Taliban and was willing to hold a dialogue with them on all issues. "No fighting has taken place between us and the Taliban. We don't want to fight our Taliban brothers as they are also Afghans," he stressed.

The same sentiments were echoed by Taliban leader Mulla Wakil Ahmad, presently in Quetta. "We haven't clashed with Dostam's troops. In fact, we are on good terms with Dostam," he maintained. He added that Taliban were waiting for the arrival of former president Sebghatullah Mojadeddi's brother, Hashmatullah Mojadeddi, and other Afghan leaders in Kabul for talks on issues concerning Afghanistan.

It may be mentioned that ex-president Rabbani's arrival in Mazar-i-Sharif Tuesday was interpreted by his supporters as a proof of an imminent anti-Taliban alliance between him and Dostam. However, Dostam's spokesman failed to mention any such alliance having taken place until now and instead spoke about the Taliban in friendly terms. Still Rabbani's men were giving the impression that an alliance against the Taliban was already in place and that other Afghan leaders were arriving in Mazar-i-Sharif to discuss joining this grouping.

The arrival of Ismail Khan in Mazar-i-Sharif, who like Rabbani, belongs to Jamiat-i-Islami party and lost Herat to the Taliban in September last year, was being termed significant as he is under Iranian influence after taking refuge in Mashhad, Iran and it was being deemed impossible that he would do something without Tehran's blessings. Lately, there has been talk of a determined effort by Ismail Khan with Iranian assistance to re-take Herat.

Karim Khalili is an ally of Dostam and has in the past demanded that ex president Rabbani must step down to pave the way for the installation of a more broad-based government. NEWS (Pakistan) 10/10

Doctoral Dissertations on Asia
published by the Association for Asian Studies, Inc.
1993 — Volume 16 (published in 1996)
compiled and edited by Frank Joseph Shulman

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Moderate Afghans start efforts for mediation

PESHAWAR – The moderate and peace-loving Afghans have once again initiated mediation among warring Afghan leaders and have held detailed talks with Taliban leaders at Kabul.

Some highly placed sources informed that a nine-member delegation of the like-minded Afghans have completed first ever tour of Kabul and arrived back in Peshawar. The delegates included Syed Hamid Gillani, Syed Ishaq Gillani, Dr Abdul Khaliq Fazal and Prof Bajuri from Australia, Prof Rasool Amin, Mohammad Hakim Aryubi, Dr Rahim Pukhtoonyar and Askar Zada.

Soon after their arrival in Peshawar, the delegates proceeded to Islamabad for briefing their like-minded countrymen about the pint of view of Taliban on the current situation of their motherland. They have also reportedly held a meeting with moderate Afghan leader and Chief of National Islamic Front of Afghanistan Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani.

On completion of negotiations at Islamabad, the delegates will likely to proceed to Mazar-i-Sharif for holding talks with Militia General and chief of the Northern Shura Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostam, former Defence Minister and warlord Ahmad Shah Masud and others. It was learnt that moderate Afghan leader Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani initiated the mediation among the warring leaders in a bid to convince both the sides for adopting political means for deciding future of their motherland. A number of Afghans, residing in foreign countries are also playing important role in the efforts.

Nation 1/4/97

Beast keeps Afghan refugees on guard all night in tentage village

From Behroz Khan

PESHAWAR: A wild animal is giving sleepless nights to Afghans at a refugee camp, keeping them on guard all the night in the tented village 20 km to the west of Peshawar.

The bear or most possibly, a wolf, has already attacked and injured three brothers at the newly established tented village in Nasir Bagh refugee camp Peshawar. Two of them, Shafiqullah, 15 and Didar, 7 had to be hospitalised for the severe injuries they received on the face and forehead. The third one, Sidiqullah, a 9 year old Afghan child was slightly injured in the attack.

Sadiqullah told The News in presence of the UNHCR staff including its programme officers Mr Rashid, Muhammad Niaz and Mehnaz that the greyish animal attacked him and his brothers as soon as they shouted at the animal. "The hairy animal having sharp nails in claws jumped over us injuring me and my brothers." narrated Siddiqullah who hardly showed any sign of terror. Sadiqullah who received injuries on the right shoulder could not differentiate between a bear and the wolf.

The animal attacked them at 10.45 pm. Sadiqullah said adding that his brother Shafiqullah shouted for help when he saw the animal at the door of the tent. "I saved myself by throwing the quilt on the animal. My brothers could not protect themselves from the thorny claws." said Sadiqullah adding that the size of the animal was bigger than a dog and had long jaws. Locals confirmed presence of wolves and wild boars but were not sure that a bear has ever showed up in the area.

Similar reports are also circulating in the FR Hasankhel area here the Afridi tribals have start patrolling in the nights near the village following an attack by some wild animal that injured one child. People are frightened in Hasankhel area after the incident. Families do not advise the near ones to travel in the night these days. Luqman Afridi, however, said that the animal believed to be a wild boar which attacked a child in Hassankhel has been killed.

The mother of Sadiqullah informed that she along with her husband Muhammad Amin were not present in the tent when the animal attacked. People informed that the couple stayed at the make shift portion of the camp that night in a bid to get an additional tent despite the fact that one had already been issued to the family the same day. The fake registration by the old Afghan refugees showing them as the newly displaced Kabulites has confronted the UNHCR staff with an awkward situation.

News (Pakistan) 12/24

FROM THE TIMES of London, 10/17/96
by Christopher Thomas:
LONE WOMAN RUNS RISK OF MILITIA'S
VENGEANCE TO CARE FOR 800 ORPHANS.

"The 800 children of Kabul orphanage are hidden victims of Taleban's ban on women working. There is nobody to care for them, save an elderly cook, a few male minders & 1 brave woman who turns up secretly every day.

"She has been beaten once by Taleban soldiers for being on the street without good reason - women are allowed out only for shopping - but she continues to make her way to the squalid, windowless institution each day. ...

"The orphanage has not a single toy, not one game, no heating or lighting, & precious little food. The children have tea & dry bread for breakfast. For lunch & dinner, there is peas, beans & rice. There is no money for meat: the institution has faced a financial crisis since Taleban captured Kabul...

"It is financed partly by UNICEF but much of the money is reportedly not getting through. There are inmates as young as 6 months & as old as 20. Some were left by mothers too poor to feed them.

"The kitchen is a filthy, soot-covered dungeon with openings for smoke to escape.. Giant cauldrons are heated by wooden fires. The cook, who cuffs children sneaking an extra handful, stirs the pot with a shovel. It is pure Oliver Twist. Children sit on benches in silence at ranks of bare tables. The lone woman fusses around - a heroine who could be flogged or lose a limb for this kindness. She worked at the orphanage before Taleban came, when there were 30 women teachers... She no longer gets paid & is sinking into poverty. She is a widow with children of her own: her previous salary of Afs. 30,000 (£4) a month enabled her to survive.

"Another widow arrived in full burqa to see the 5 children she recently abandoned. She threw off her veil contemptuously: until Taleban came she never wore one.... A dozen babies cried in their cots or crawled around, untended.

"There are 190,000 children in Kabul under 5, according to Action Contre la Faim, which conducted a survey of child nutrition. One third of all the children are ill; half are moderately or severely stunted. Half have no father. Before the Islamic fighters arrived, it was estimated that Kabul had 24,000 acutely malnourished children. Because their mothers are not allowed to work, the figure now must be substantially higher. ...

It is estimated that 1 child in 6 dies in Kabul before the age of 5 - one of the world's highest mortality rates. There are countless child beggars in the capital. Mothers, fully veiled, sit in the streets with babies in their laps, begging for food..."

With women kept away, older Afghan orphans care for young

By ANWAR FARUQI
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Parwaneh is barely 7 years old, but she has a lot of grown-up chores to do at the orphanage in the beleaguered Afghan capital.

Since the arrival of the Taliban religious army in Kabul more than two weeks ago, the older children of the 500 left at the orphanage have had to take care of the younger ones.

The women who once fed and cared for them are being kept away by the new rulers, whose strict version of Islam won't let women work outside the home.

With a chubby 2-year-old propped on her tiny hip, Parwaneh carefully descended the dirty cement stairs to a communal bathing area, where she scrubbed her new charge.

"I have to take care of the babies, because we have no one to take care of them," she said.

Parwaneh shares her dormitory-style room at the four-story brick orphanage with about a dozen other girls between 11 and 16 years old.

Lunch of broth and bread is served in a large, dark dining hall, where the only light comes from a tiny window high above the old wooden tables and benches.

On the wall outside, children using black chalk have drawn a helicopter dropping bombs. Nearby, there is a child's drawing of a Kalashnikov rifle with a tank next to it. There is nothing more.

"Everything is in disarray," said Mirza Mir Bhaluli, the deputy director of the orphanage, which was home to about 900 children before the Taliban arrived.

"I don't know what to do. We need women to take care of these children," he said. Women made up more than 85 percent of his staff.

But the women of Kabul are afraid, for the Taliban fighters have been uncompromising.

And the Taliban doesn't seem to realize that education for boys also will suffer in Kabul, where 70 percent of the teachers were wome

"We don't even have teachers for these children," said Bhaluli.

After the Taliban victory, about 400 children were removed by family members who had left them there, hoping the state could give the children what they couldn't — most notably, an education.

"Some of their guardians were so unhappy with the conditions that they decided they could care for these children better than we could," said Bhaluli.

One elderly woman, who has cared for the orphans through the worst factional fighting in the Afghan capital, has defied the Taliban edict.

"I am afraid of no one," she said, stroking the head of a tiny boy. "How will I answer to God if I leave these small children, who have no one? They can't run away. They are helpless."

VALLEY TIMES (San Francisco) 10/15/96

The Many Faces of Islamic Law

By **ELAINE SCIOLINO**

WASHINGTON

SINCE they seized Kabul two weeks ago, the Islamic student-warriors of Afghanistan have brought to the capital the same harsh rules they had already imposed on other parts of the country. They have closed girls' schools and forced women to stay home from work. They have banned music, shut down movie theaters, ordered men to grow full beards and women to cover their entire bodies, even their faces. They have forbidden surgeons from operating on members of the opposite sex and reintroduced stoning as the penalty for adultery. When a group of men tried to flee the scene of a public hanging, they were beaten and forced to watch. One cleric even called for the killing of all alcohol drinkers.

All in the name of Islam. The Taliban — the word means "student" — say they are determined to create a pure Islamic state based on the teachings of the Koran and a strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic holy law.

But is it Islam?

And if so, whose Islam is it?

A Long Debate

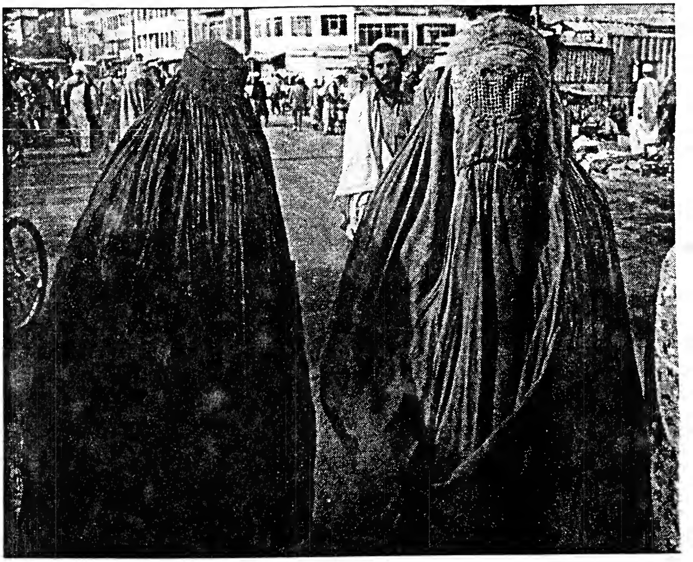
For centuries, the Muslim world has been consumed by an intense, often angry debate on the use and abuse of Islamic law, a debate that in recent times has inflamed anti-Muslim sentiment around the world whenever a government or religious movement turns repressive in the name of Islam.

"When Muslims today talk about reapplying Islam they have to face whether to simply restore the laws and doctrines of the distant past or submit them to reinterpretation in light of current social, political and economic conditions," said John Esposito, director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. "That is what a lot of the struggle is about. It's much the same with Christianity and Judaism."

One difficulty in finding constants is that the Koran itself does not provide a legal code and includes only 80 verses that can be thought of as "laws." So the interpretation of God's will for society must be worked out by Muslims themselves along the way. And that depends on conditions specific to time and place.

Another difficulty is the variety of interpreters who could be a head of state (like Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya, an idiosyncratic socialist), a chief cleric or body of clerics (like the religious leaders of Iran) or a Muslim bloc in Parliament (like Kuwait's religious right, which wants gender-segregated classrooms).

That has produced vastly different versions of Islamic law. Islam allows a man to take four wives, but he must treat them equally; some Islamic scholars and politicians argue that since this is impossible, polygamy should be banned.



Under the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law, Afghan women must now keep themselves

Islam calls for cutting off the hand of a thief, but the teachings of one early Muslim leader include forgiving a thief who has stolen out of need; this leads some scholars to preach that amputation for theft is justified only in a society where goods are distributed equally between rich and poor — a society, they say, that does not exist.

Sometimes the application of Islamic law is based more on practicality than on religious purity.

In Malaysia, 40 percent of the people are Muslim, Islam is the official religion and Sharia courts rule on family issues like marriage, divorce and child custody. But Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad is determined to blend Islam with economic progress, which demands some deference to global standards. So he recently forced one province to abandon a plan that would have required the stoning to death of adulterers and the cutting off thieves' hands.

Modern Times

The constitution gives the federal government authority over criminal law, he argued. "Only when Islam is interpreted so as to be relevant in a world which is so different from what it was 1,400 years ago can Islam be regarded as a religion for all ages," he said.

In Somalia, by contrast, a strict Islamic criminal code was imposed two years ago, largely to restore order. The hands and feet of 13 armed robbers have been sawed off — in public and without anesthetic — and then hung out to dry in front of a local stadium. Law enforcement officials boast that such vivid punishment has led to a plunge in violent crime.

Where one school of Islamic law is tried and doesn't seem to work, it has sometimes been replaced by another.

Morocco used to allow a guardian of a young girl to arrange a marriage without her consent, under the prescriptions of an eighth-century Islamic jurist. But in 1993 the country embraced the views of another eighth-century jurist, who argued that the traditions of the Prophet require a woman's consent in marriage.

Since Islam is such a patriarchal religion, much of Islamic law seems designed to repress women for the sake of protecting them. But Islamic law is also open to interpretation, so it can be used to argue for women's rights.

When Kuwait held elections for Parliament this month in which only men could vote, a London-based Muslim organization, Liberty for the Muslim World, protested on religious grounds. "The Kuwaiti democratic process fails to recognize the rights of women to vote and be nominated for election, although Islam granted these rights to women 13 centuries before any modern universal declaration or international covenant did," the group wrote. (When Mohammed was chosen to lead the Muslims, a delegation of women from Arabia came to him with their vote of confidence, a sign to some of the right of Muslim women to participate

A Manual On Rights Of Women Under Islam

By BARBARA CROSSETTE

For several years, an informal group of Muslim women from around the world has met to spur discussion among Muslims everywhere about the rights of women. Now, with the shadow of a repressive Islamic regime in Afghanistan hovering over the debate, the group has produced a manual on the rights of women under Islam.

Intended to be adaptable to a wide range of cultures, the new publication, "Claiming Our Rights: A Manual for Women's Human Rights Education in Muslim Societies," will be tested over the next year in five very different countries: Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia and Uzbekistan. The plan is to assemble discussion groups to exchange ideas on the subject. There has already been a quiet trial run among a group of university women in Iran.

"There is a great change in self-awareness among women in Muslim societies," said Mahnaz Afkhami, executive director of the Sisterhood Is Global Institute, a private organization based in Bethesda, Md. Ms. Afkhami directed the effort on the manual, produced with the help of the National Endowment for Democracy and the Ford Foundation.

Sometimes at great risk to themselves, women are making gains, though frequently small and fragile. But developments like the introduction of more egalitarian family laws in North Africa often go unnoticed, Ms. Afkhami said, because militants and fundamentalists dominate contemporary images of Islam.

"This very sound-bite-friendly Islamicist movement doesn't allow the other side to be heard," she said in an interview. "But women are often the center of debate, even in Iran."

Ms. Afkhami, who was Minister for Women's Affairs in the Government of the last Shah of Iran, Mohammed Riza Pahlevi, has strong critics among Islamic women because of that. And she is aware that promoting women's rights from a base outside the Muslim world attracts the criticism that the campaign is Western and alien.

"We are not confrontational," she said. "Our manual is Islam-based and not threatening. Our hope is that we can get people to engage in dialogue."

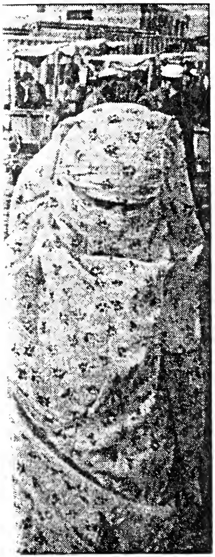
The manual on women's rights in Islam — which is being published in Arabic, Bengali, Malay, Persian and Uzbek as well as English — contains instructions for conducting grass-roots discussions. It also includes sometimes provocative passages from the Koran — like those about a husband's punishment of an "ill-behaved" wife — and the Hadith, the often-disputed collection of teachings of Mohammed as recorded by religious leaders centuries later. Juxtaposed are texts of major international agreements on human rights, particularly women's rights, which many Muslim nations have signed.

The book briefly profiles four women it calls "the first heroines of Islam": two wives of Mohammed; his daughter Fatima, and Zainab, the sister of a Shiite leader who persuaded a victorious enemy to spare her brother's life. There is also a sampling of Arab proverbs about women, a bibliography, and the names, addresses and telephone and fax numbers of women's rights groups throughout the Islamic world.

Women who contributed to the manual brought a range of experiences to bear, Ms. Afkhami said. In Bangladesh, there is an interest in more sophisticated political training at the local level. In Uzbekistan, women are concerned that they will lose rights they enjoyed under Communism. In Malaysia, women's organizations are engaged in scholarly revision of traditional Muslim laws.

"Give women rights, let them participate — that's the lesson of Malaysia," Ms. Afkhami said. "The spirit of our religion is egalitarian."

NYT 12/29/96



Alan Chin for The New York Times

entirely covered in public.

in the electoral process.)

For many Islamic scholars, the Taliban in Afghanistan are grossly distorting Islam in much of what they are doing — their bans on girls attending school and on women working, for example. "The Koran has many statements about education as a duty for every male and female Muslim," said Professor Azizah al-Hibri of the University of Richmond. Certainly not all women in the Prophet's family stayed home: his wife once led a group of Muslims into battle.

A Bad Name

Even Iran has accused the Taliban of giving Islam a bad name. Whatever the excesses of Iran's revolution, the country's religious leaders are locked in a perpetual, lively debate over what is Islamic, from how much authority to give the country's spiritual guide to whether women can ride bicycles. (Women do work, vote, drive cars, run businesses and hold seats in Parliament).

"The world does not accept what the Taliban are doing in the name of Islam," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's spiritual leader, said in a speech. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati went even further, apparently forgetting the early days of Iran's revolution, with its swift executions and taking of hostages. "How is this going to introduce Islam in the outside world?" he asked. "What violence and narrow-mindedness in the name of Islam."

NYT 11/?

Taliban acknowledge women's issues as stumbling block with Wes

KABUL: The treatment of women in Afghanistan is a stumbling block to better relations between the Taleban movement which rules most of the country and the West, a senior minister acknowledged Sunday. "We know that the main problem between us and the outside world is the issue of women," said Sher Mohammad Abas Stanakzai, acting Taleban deputy foreign minister. He said whenever foreigners questioned the Taleban, they invariably were "bothered" about women's rights, particularly concerning education and employment, he said.

The Taleban have been criticised for closing girls' schools and not allowing women to go to work. To clarify the Taleban position, Stanakzai stressed that under Islam, education was "a must for both men and women." "We know that all these problems in Afghanistan, all the bloodshed, is because of illiteracy," observed Stanakzai, adding by way of illustration that if a mother is illiterate her children would grow up in the same ignorant manner.

"But if a woman is well educated, her children will in the future be more effective persons in society," he noted.

Stanakzai said the Education Ministry had promised that some of Kabul's schools for girls would be reopened when the new school term commenced after the Afghan winter.

Stanakzai acknowledged that Rabbani and co-leaders like ex-prime minister Gulbadddin Hikmatyar were also Muslims - "they pray five times a day" - but the Taleban regarded their administration as un-Islamic. He said the former government was corrupt and its military commanders abused both their power and the local people. "We want a pure Islamic state to be formed in Afghanistan," said Stanakzai.

After that he said, "no one will be denied education", but it would be according to "Islamic rules and regulations" which called for segregation by sex.

Stanakzai said the Taleban had established a committee to examine ways how women could be accommodated in the public workplace - according to Islamic rules and regulations.

He gave no further details and added that no conclusions had yet been reached in this matter. —AFP

NEWS 12/23
(Pakistan)

An everyday story of Afghan folk is a BBC hit

By Sandra Barwick

THE BBC World Service's successful Archers-style serial has survived Taliban restrictions in Afghanistan and has the nation gripped. . . .

The Taliban, the fervent Islamic rulers of two thirds of Afghanistan, have smashed the heads of statues, banned tambourines and festooned their gunposts with tape ripped from cassettes. Television is forbidden and those found in possession of videos are paraded in the streets in the back of a pick-up truck, faces blackened, the tape strung round their necks.

But one amusement is still available: a BBC Afghan version of The Archers, inspired by the English radio soap, complete with village feuding and an Eddie Grundy figure.

In their mud houses, lit by oil lamps, a nation is gripped. "We all ask each other, what happened last night? Even the young Taliban listen to it," said one 27-year-old Pashtun who preferred to remain anonymous. "Although sometimes a mullah passes by and switches it off." Today the first bumper programme is being broadcast to its many devotees.

It is a mark of the soap's popularity after it was launched three years ago with the help of Liz Rigby, the former editor of The Archers. The Afghan soap, New Home, New Life is broadcast by the BBC World Service in Pashtu and Persian. The series concerns not one rural village but two, unimaginatively known as "upper village" and "lower village". Given the amount of feuding the Pashtun code of vengeance provokes, instead of Ambridge the villages could be more aptly christened Lower and Upper Umbrage. The Archers has been criticised for being too full of incident to be realistic for a small Midlands village. In the Afghanistan series, any plot development is likely to be smaller than life.

While Jack Woolley, the owner of Grey Gables, was held up in a post office raid in Ambridge, his Afghan equivalent Khair Mohammed, a respected village elder, was shot dead by a local Horobin-type tearaway, Majeed. Afghan listeners wrote in to say they had held condolence services for him in their

Like Caroline Pemberton, née Bone, there are several young women whose love lives are consistently blighted, not so much because they consistently fall for unsuitable men as because of their lovers' inability to pay a high dowry price. In southern Afghanistan a comely village woman is reckoned to be worth about 30 sheep.

Despite its entertainment value, the soap is accepted by the Taliban. Gordon Adam, former head of the Pashtu section of the World Service and consultant to the series, said: "A senior member of the Taliban has told us that they like it, even though they won't re-broadcast it because it has female voices in it."

As with The Archers, the soap was conceived as an educational project. The plots aim to teach Afghans about agriculture, health, hygeine and even, perhaps optimistically, reconciliation.

Partially funded by the Red Cross, it is for many women the only education on offer. "A lot of women hear it in Pashtu" said Dr Saied Fahima, a doctor trained in Kabul. "If their husband listens to the radio they are often allowed to hear it as well. Some of them have already heard about oral rehydration salts for their children when they are sick through the plots, as well as vaccination programmes. It's very useful."

But the pious intentions of the programme's makers are sometimes misinterpreted. When Nazer, the soap's Eddie Grundy, a likeable rogue, set fire to his neighbour's crops under the cover of darkness, the programme's makers received a shoal of letters from fans. They were expressing gratitude for an idea that had worked for them too.

International News
Friday 27 December 1996

Electronic Telegraph
Issue 581

EXCERPTS

U.N. Warns Afghans Over Rights for Women

. . .

Officials estimate that there are 25,000 to 30,000 widows in Kabul alone, many of whom are supporting families through programs in which Afghan women are employed to persuade other Afghan women to accept a variety of services, from prenatal care to schools to income-generating activities. The harsh Taliban restrictions on women, including barring them from workplaces, threaten to destroy the effectiveness of these and other aid programs, officials warned.

In other countries where women are generally repressed, United Nations officials have not faced similar practical consequences for their own work. In Iran, for example, though it has a fundamentalist Government, women take an active part in family planning and other international programs. . . .

Mr. Boutros-Ghali's stand is also likely to fuel debate within the organization between those who argue that helping suffering Afghans with food and reconstruction should outweigh considerations about women's rights for the time being. An official said that last week in Geneva, "the word dilemma was used a thousand times" by relief experts meeting to chart a course. As of today, the organization has 54 people based in Afghanistan, only one of whom is a woman.

"United Nations officials seek to cooperate closely with governments in the delivery of all sorts of programs and assistance," the Secretary General said. "But at the same time, the U.N. system is obliged to be guided by the norms and requirements stated in the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the related resolutions of the General Assembly."

Mr. Boutros-Ghali said that after talking with the heads of agencies and offices in Afghanistan, where the Taliban militia has barred women from work, he decided that it was time to restate clearly the organization's commitment to the principle that the rights of men and women are equal.

The unequivocal language was surprising to many because the United Nations had not made similar threats to the ousted Government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, which was only slightly less hostile to women in public life.

NYT 10/8

In war-ravaged Kabul, garbage is becoming matter for survival

REUTERS

KHAIR KHANA PASS, Afghanistan — Khan Zarren thinks he is somewhere between 70 and 80 years old.

To survive, he spends all day from dawn to dusk digging for animal bones in Kabul's municipal dump near Khair Khana Pass just west of the capital.

"This is the first time I have had to do this," he says, "but there is no work in the market, and I must earn some money to live."

His immaculate white turban and soiled clothes speak of pride sacrificed on the altar of necessity.

Up to 3,000 people work in a post-apocalyptic landscape framed against the majestic backdrop of the snow-capped foothills of the Hindu Kush. They move, ant-like, with pickax and shovel, trenching the waste of Kabul.

The ground is strewn with rags, spent syringes, infusion bags and bandages crusted with blood, a legacy of the bloodshed caused by four years of internecine war in Kabul.

Afghanistan — one of the poorest countries in the world — is almost untouched by the throw-away culture. Everything from spent tank shells and armor plating to plastic bottles is hoarded and sold or recycled.

The Taliban recently decreed that paper was not to be thrown away because it might have been printed with the same Arabic writing as is used in the Koran. To throw it away would constitute an insult to Islam.

> Their lives in ruin after years of fighting, Afghans are forced to scavenge to make a living.

At the same time, the Taliban outlawed paper bags on the grounds that they might be thrown away.

Pickings at the dump are lean.

Most of the scavengers look for animal bones.

"Most of us are digging for the bones of cows and sheep," says 30-year-old Juma Gul. "We take them down to the market and sell them to dealers. They sell them on to Pakistan, where they are turned into tablets or soap.

"In a good day, working from sunrise to sunset, I get 10 to 11 kilograms [25 pounds], each kilo is worth about 1,000 Afghanis [5 cents]," he adds.

Juma Gul denies news reports that there has been any trade in human bones.

"No man, especially not a Muslim, would sell human bones," he says.

Juma Gul says he was forced to work at the dump to earn money when the front line in the battle between the Taliban and the ousted government and their allies moved north of Kabul, into the Shomali Valley, where he lives.

"Most of the people here come from the Shomali. Most of them have lost all their land and belongings and they were compelled to find an alternative means of survival," he said.

The onset of the bitter Afghan winter, when temperatures fall below zero, has also made casual work harder to find.

The civil war that has ravaged Afghanistan since the communists were defeated in 1992 has reduced much of the country, and Kabul in particular, to penury.

The inhabitants of the Shomali Valley were relatively lucky. The battlefields were a safe distance away, and the blockade of Kabul pushed up the prices of the food that grew in their fertile fields.

However, since the Taliban took Kabul in late September and moved north, the Shomalis have borne the brunt of the fighting between the inheritors of Afghanistan's chaos.

The populations of whole villages have been forced to flee the fighting, and hundreds of houses have been bombed or burned to the ground.

As Khan Zarren swings his ax, battered Japanese and Russian jeeps flying the white flag of the Taliban hurry along the road by the dump toward the front line some 12 miles farther north.

Not all those searching the trash are freelancers forced to find any source of money they can.

Khalil, who like many Afghans uses only one name, works in a *hamam*, or public bath. He takes his cart into the trash each day to forage for bandages and plastic to burn to heat the bath water.

For Khan Zarren and the thousands of other workers, the dump is a last resort. "Our life is ruined: we don't know what to do or where to go," he says.

Chicago Tribune, Friday, December 20, 1996

The Afghan Daily News - AFP

KABUL, Feb 5 (AFP) - The Taliban religious militia said Wednesday they would rather negotiate with opposition leader Abdul Karim Khalili than fight his Hezb-i-Wahdat Shia Party based in central Bamyan province. . . .

Taliban forces, which moved into the Ghorband valley after hard fighting through the strategic Salang valley over the past week, have taken the Sheikh Ali district, 140 kilometres (87 miles) northwest of Kabul and are now poised to attack Bamiyan province. . . .

The easy advance by the Taliban through Ghorband, one of three mountainous routes to northern Afghanistan, has been helped by the defection to their side of a large number of local armed villagers, who claim they were mistreated by the opposition alliance.

CHRONOLOGY

10/9 - Reuters - The European Commission criticized Taleban, accusing it of depriving women of fundamental rights.

10/14 - The Times (London) - Christopher Thomas reports that Kabul Radio was renamed Radio Shariat by the Taleban. A single sheet underground newspaper has appeared in Kabul but anyone caught with a copy is certain of severe punishment.

10/23 - Reuters (via Infoseek) - Iranian women's groups have called Taleban's restrictions on women "un-Islamic. Under Islamic teachings, women enjoy a high & special status & have social, cultural, political & economic rights. It is therefore amazing that the occupying Taleban, backed undoubtedly by America, uses Islam as an excuse to do the greatest injustice to Afghan women."

10/27 - Electronic Telegraph - While Taleban beats drug users & broadcasts about the dangers of narcotics & alcohol, it is financing its holy war with profits from the world's 2nd largest opium crop. The poppies planted now in areas under Taleban control will be blooming in April. The UN says it will not provide aid to any area where opium is grown. (See pps 17 - 21 for related articles.)

11/5 - Reuters - Taleban accused Iran of providing men & ammunition to the opposition. Iran said it was surprised at the accusations saying it [Iran] was one of the countries calling for an end to external interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

11/19 - Reuters (via Yahoo) - The UN hopes to airlift relief supplies to thousands of Afghans displaced by fighting in northwestern Afghanistan, particularly Badghis.

11/20 - Reuters - The UN halted most of its assistance activities in Kabul because its staff members were being harassed.

12/4 - Reuters - According to UNICEF, the maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is 1,700 per 100,000 live births, the 2nd worst in the world. UNICEF estimates the literacy rate for women at 3% to 4%.

12/10 - Atlanta Journal/Constitution -

Diplomats at a Muslim conference in Jakarta, **Indonesia,** appealed for more Islamic peacemaking, but were unable to end squabbling over which **Afghan** faction would represent the war-ravaged country. Foreign ministers of the 53-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference decided to leave the Afghan seat empty "to preserve a climate conducive to productive discussions," Indonesian diplomat Izhar Ibrahim said. The Taliban religious army captured Afghanistan's capital in September and controls two-thirds of the country. Both the militia and the ousted government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, which still holds Afghanistan's U.N. seat, sent envoys to the conference.

12/11 - Reuters correspondent Tim Johnston reported on UNHCR estimates that up to 50,000 people have left Kabul since the Taleban takeover . The common destinations are Pakistan & Jalalabad. About 1.4m refugees still reside in Iran & close to 900,000 are still in Pakistan. The internal displacement is about 1m. The UN hopes to raise $133m for aid for Afghanistan in 1997.

12/12 - Valley Times (San Francisco) - The UN resumed its aid program in Kabul after Taliban freed 4 arrested UN workers.

12/21 - NYT - Tajik gunmen seized 23 hostages from a UN convoy. The gunmen belonged to a group loyal to "Rambo" Sadirov, a mercenary leader believed to be in Afghanistan. The captors want Russian border guards to create a safe passage for Sadirov's fighters to return to Tajikistan.

12/22 - NYT - The Tajik gunmen (see 12/21) released all but 2 of their hostages. Reasons for the release were not given.

12/24 - WSJ - Tajikistan's president signed a cease-fire with the main opposition group.

12/28 - Washington Post - The Taliban began an offensive near Kalikan, about 12 miles north of Kabul & rolled over enemy positions. (See 12/30, 31.)

12/30 - WSJ - Taleban forces pushed back former gov't forces north of Kabul & now threaten the air base from which attacks on the capital are being flown.

- Frontier Post (Peshawar) - The Afghan team won the championship at a Taekwando contest in Karachi. About 400 contenders from several countries took part.

Brother of ex-Afghan leaders mourns them after executions

By T.T. Nhu¶
Knight-Ridder Newspapers¶
(KRT)¶

FREMONT, Calif. — Sediqullah Rahi was working one of his three jobs at 9 p.m. one night when he heard the news from half a world away.¶

"I'm sorry," said a fellow Afghan who drove up to the AM/PM market in Fremont's Warm Springs district market. "But they've executed your brother."¶

Stunned, Sediqullah, 45, managed to finish his cashier's shift at 11 p.m. When he got home, he was unable to find anything on the radio or television about the coup scored by the Taliban militia in the swift takeover of Afghanistan September 27.¶

It was not until the next morning, when papers across the country ran pictures of both his brothers, former president Najibullah and his security chief Ahmedzi, hanging by the neck in Kabul, that he knew the full extent of what had happened to his family.¶

"I lost both of my brothers," said Sediqullah, as he sat in a Denny's early one recent morning, before his marathon workday began.¶

Like many Afghans, Sediqullah uses his given name. He is a long way from the mountains of southern Afghanistan, where his family is from. Seven years ago, Sediqullah left a life of relative comfort on the fringes of power, for uneasy exile in the United States.¶

He is eking out a living, working three jobs. In many ways, he is living a life here that parallels his expatriate countrymen in California's Bay Area, who comprise the largest number of Afghans outside Kabul.¶

The Rahi family's rise to power and notoriety, followed by the fall, is emblematic of Afghanistan's turbulent recent history. Families, clans, and ethnic groups became enmeshed then splintered, by new political ideologies, imported from neighboring countries, that reduced Afghanistan to ashes and scattered Afghans all over the globe.¶

There were four Rahi brothers and two sisters. They are Pashtun, the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan, from Paktia, in the eastern mountains, near Pakistan.¶

Although they had all been very close while growing up, the brothers were bitterly estranged in later years because of their political divergence.¶

Najibullah, the oldest, was brilliant and ambitious. By the time he was 15, he was politically active, Sediqullah recalled. As a student, he was a founder of the People's Democratic Party at Kabul University in 1964. His career, under a Soviet-backed Afghan government, steadily climbed.¶

When Najibullah was installed as president by Moscow to replace his mentor, Babrak Kamal, in May 1986, Sediqullah said he began to doubt the wisdom of having ties with the Soviet Union.¶

"I pointed out to my brother that it wasn't right to deny people the right to speak out, to assemble, you know, basic human rights," said Sediqullah, who was trained as a lawyer. "My brother said to me, 'You're thinking just like a Westerner."'¶

His younger brother, Ahmedzi, by then Najibullah's security chief, also turned against the brother who'd raised him.¶

Twice Sediqullah tried to escape Kabul. Each time, he was betrayed and imprisoned in his brother's jails for a total of four months. The president once sent an emissary to the incarcerated Sediqullah and offered him an ambassadorship if he really wanted to leave the country, he said. Sediqullah turned him down, telling Najibullah that he was a captive of the Soviets and that he wouldn't survive once they were ousted.¶

Little did Sediqullah know how much further Afghanistan would plunge into nearly total destruction.¶

In 1987, he took his wife and two small children to the Panjshir Valley to seek help from the guerrilla leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud. After spending a year and a half with Massoud, the family walked, like many other Afghans, for five days to Peshawar, Pakistan. He was granted political asylum in the United States.¶

Najibullah denounced Sediqullah publicly: "My brother has broken with his family. He's broken with his people and his country."¶

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, its army, in tatters, finally withdrew from Afghanistan in 1992. Under pressure from a coalition of rival generals, Najibullah resigned in April that year, saying that he wanted to avoid further bloodshed and pave the way to end the 13-year-old civil war. By that time, the Associated Press estimated there were over a million were killed in the fighting. Najibullah and Ahmedzi took refuge in the U.N. compound, where they awaited their trial for the disappearance and deaths of hundreds during the regime.¶

In his resignation speech, Najibullah predicted the country it would plunge into chaos if the war continued. If Afghans didn't move toward national reconciliation, he warned "rivers of blood would flow."¶

"And this is exactly what we're seeing now, rivers of blood" observed Sediqullah.¶

Continued on next page...

Taleban remain mystery to outsiders

By Suzanne Goldenberg
LONDON GUARDIAN

KABUL, Afghanistan — Mohammed Rasool has been consumed by war. His left shin has been replaced by a plastic shield, and his withered right arm hangs useless by his side. But he's still a soldier, and he has a new master to serve.

Currently the guardian of a Soviet-built housing complex in Kabul, he wears the long-tailed turban of the Taleban Islamic movement — only the latest guerrilla group for which he has fought during the last 12 years.

But he hasn't adjusted to their strict moral code, defying a ban on drug use to smoke up to 10 marijuana cigarettes a day — just to dull the pain of living.

"An accountant wouldn't be able to keep track of the people I have killed," he moaned. "There is no future and I can't imagine peace Our houses have collapsed and our families have scattered. What do we have to look forward to?"

Representatives of international organizations in Kabul believe the absorption of fighters like Mohammed Rasool is crucial to an understanding of the Taleban, who three months after the capture o the Afghan capital remain a mystery to the outside world.

As the Taleban troops rolled through Afghanistan, local commanders found it expedient to join them. Aid workers argue that th Taleban are no longer sure who in their ranks, and that thei harshness toward the citizens o Kabul — a far more sophisticate populace than those of the village from where the Taleban sprang i 1994 — betrays that fear.

In Darhi-speaking Kabul, th mainly Pathan Taleban are the ou siders, deeply suspicious of ethn Tajiks and Panjshiris, people fro the stronghold of one of the con manders whose offensive ha stalled on the front line 12 mil north of the city. That suspici has translated into arbitrary a rests and torture.

By ruling through terror, the a gument goes, the Taleban hope restore some cohesion to a mov ment that has been infiltrated, a perhaps tainted, by the fighters conquered mujahideen groups.

"These 'Talebs' that walk the city are a bit different from the people in the ministries. These people in the ministries are not in control,' " said an employee at one of the international aid organizations in Kabul.

The leader of the Taleban is Mullah Mohammed Omar, a one-eyed cleric who heads the organization's supreme council or "shura." Real power is believed to be vested in the extremely conservative town of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, where he founded the movement in 1994. Almost nothing is known about how policy is decided within the Taleban, or how commands are transmitted to various gunmen.

"If there is a decision-making structure, it has not yet been made accessible to outsiders," said Paula Newberg, a senior fellow at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University in Washington and a consultant to the United Nations on Afghanistan.

The ideology of the Taleban is also not clear, beyond a commitment to imposing Islamic rule, or "sharia." But Sher Mohammed Stanikzai, the deputy foreign minister who has become the Taleban's main point of contact with the outside world, dismisses suggestions of divisions.

"There is no such group as fundamentalists or moderates," he said. "We are all the same from top to bottom. There is no difference in our belief or in our way of doing."

Miss Newberg believes the confusion about the Taleban's intent arises from the speed of their victory, which came as a surprise even to them. Now that the other mujahideen groups have been routed from two-thirds of Afghanistan, they're unsure what to do.

"They conceive of themselves as still being at war," she said. "The impetus that drove them originally was to remove the insecurities that corrupt commanders had made in areas under their control. Now they find themselves in the unexpected position of being administrators, but neither do they have the background or experience to do so."

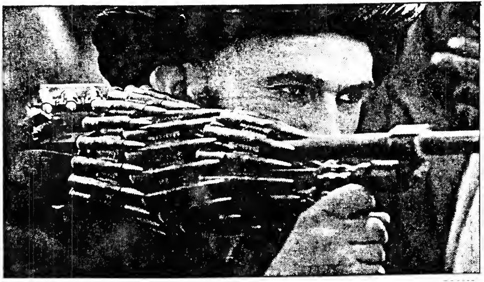
Although most Afghans have seen the discipline of the Taleban as a deliverance from the lawlessness of the earlier commanders, it's not clear how long they'll be willing to tolerate their strict interpretation of Islam. Four million Afghans have returned home since 1992, and most are loath to face exile again.

The Taleban are also ambivalent in their attitude toward the outside world. "They want the outside world to deal with them mainly because they need help in reconstruction, but they are not asking for the outside world to approve of them and they are not asking for the people of Afghanistan to approve of them," Miss Newberg said.

Such confusion is evident in the Taleban's dealings with international aid organizations in Kabul. The United Nations still clings to the hope that the Taleban will be tempered by the task of administering Kabul.

U.N. representatives recently said they had secured a promise from the Taleban that the ban on education for girls would be lifted when schools reopen in March.

"It's happening. The windows have been opening in the last week or two," said Terry Pitzner of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. "I think they are discovering that Kabul is a different culture and has had to be dealt with differently."



A Taliban machine-gunner prepares to leave Kabul for the front line.

• *Distributed by Scripps Howard.*

Washington Times
1/11/97

Continued from previous page...

When the Taliban swept in, the end came swiftly for Najibullah, the communist President of Afghanistan from 1986 till 1992. After his brothers' bloody executions on Sept. 27, 10,000 people came from Paktiar came to Kabul to reclaim the bodies of their native sons. The remains of Najibullah and Ahmedzi were brought back to the mountains for burial.¶

"How can describe to you what I feel, especially about my brother, Ahmedzi, whom I took care of when our mother got sick when he was born," asked Sediqullah.¶

In California, Afghans visited Sediqullah to offer their condolences. "Even though Najibullah was very cruel and was responsible for many deaths when he was head of the Khad, (the secret police) he should not have been killed that way," said Mohammed Omar, one local resident.¶

Now separated from his wife, Soraya, Sediqullah lives in a stark Fremont apartment, practically bereft of furniture. "It's not important how I live right now in this temporary situation. I came here with nothing and think that it's more important that we not steal other people's property to make a better life for ourselves outside Afghanistan."¶

These days, Sediqullah works around the clock. He works in a flower shop in Fremont from 9 a.m. till 3 p.m. then goes to his next job at the AM/PM in until 11 p.m. From there he races over to his third job at the Minimart in Fremont until 7 a.m. Asked when he manages to sleep, he replied cheerfully, "I don't. But for the short term, it's possible, because I am doing it."¶

Since his brothers' deaths, Sediqullah has been observing traditional funeral rituals which have been attended by many local Afghans. Sediqullah has a lot on his mind.¶

Now the the oldest living son, he is the head of the family and theoretically responsible its welfare. His sisters and their families are in refugee camp in Pakistan. Najibullah's and Ahmedzi's families are in in India and the youngest brother, Roshan, 32, lives in Switzerland. The family is separated by more than just distance. Ever since Sediqullah broke with his brothers in 1988, their families have stopped communicating with Sediqullah.¶

Like other Afghan exiles, Sediqullah is haunted by the loss of his country. His immediate family, his extended family, his country — everything is shattered.¶

He's working around the clock trying to salvage his splintered life. "I must recover my family, my homeland," he said with the fervor of a man who has nothing else to lose.¶

(c) 1996, San Jose Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.). Distributed by Knight-Ridder/Tribune Information Services.¶ AP-NY-11-27-96

War at Its Clumsiest, and Now a Necessary Healer

By JOHN F. BURNS

KABUL, Afghanistan, Dec. 21 — In Kabul and other cities of Afghanistan, there is a roll-call of foreigners whose names bring ready approval and disdain.

With a burning sense of their own history, Afghans remember Burnes and MacNaghten and Cavagnari, British officials who led attempts to make Afghanistan a tributary of British rule in 19th-century India, and paid with their lives. In recent times there have been Brezhnev and Reagan and Thatcher, who made the country a cold-war battleground in the 1980's, and played their own roles in the wasteland that Afghanistan has become.

And then there is Alberto Cairo.

Mr. Cairo — Alberto to every Afghan who knows him — was never a household name in Italy, where he once worked as a lawyer. But the slim, trim-bearded, elegant, tennis-playing Italian, who in appearance could easily slip back onto the fashionable piazzas he left behind in Milan and Turin, is incontestably the most appreciated foreigner to have come here in the chaos and war of recent years, at least among those who have suffered worst.

When Mr. Cairo, 44, arrived in Kabul seven years ago, he had left his legal career behind, retrained as a physiotherapist, and accepted an assignment to a war hospital in the Afghan capital run by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Now, he directs a group of expanding orthopedic centers run by the Geneva-based Red Cross in Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, four of the country's largest cities, all the while giving away much of his Red Cross salary to help widows, orphans and others in special need.

To Afghans who have been physically disabled in the conflict, perhaps 300,000 people in a population of 16 million, Mr. Cairo is a man who has made it possible for the lame to walk.

For another 200,000 and more who have other disabilities that are war-related, like polio and tuberculosis-related deformities that became more common as the war destroyed the basics of health care, the clinics Mr. Cairo runs hold out almost the only hope of regaining at least partial use of their limbs.

To mention Mr. Cairo to a one-legged shoeshine man on a dusty sidewalk in Kabul, or to a sightless, legless vegetable seller in Jalalabad, is to prompt instant recognition. "Alberto!" they say. "Alberto is our friend."

But to speak of this renown to Mr. Cairo is to expose an edge of impatience that is invisible when he is rushing about the Kabul orthopedic center, supervising a staff of more than 100 Afghan workers, 60 percent of whom are disabled.

To be in Afghanistan, Mr. Cairo said, especially to be out on the concrete "runway" behind the Kabul center when the disabled pull on their new legs and take the first fearful steps toward mobility, offers a satisfaction he never knew in Italy.

"It is enough for me to be one of those foreigners who came here to do something positive for those who have suffered," he said. "Checking himself, he said, "Not *for* those who have suffered, *with* those who have suffered."

The sentiment is not hard to understand when the newly limbed reach the end of the runway, where a full-length mirror allows them to stand, sometimes for minutes at a time, admiring what they have become again. Small children, young women, hardened soldiers, react much the same, angling this way and that, shifting weight forward and back, hiking down their trouser legs to see how natural the new limb or limbs can be made to look.

Those who work at the Kabul center, recruited from among patients, produce artificial legs and hands, splints and braces and calipers, crutches and the wheelchairs, from materials that are often scrounged from the war wreckage. Nuts, bolts and washers come from scrap merchants, steel from Soviet tanks, and rubber from Russian tires.

With economies like these, Mr. Cairo spends most of the $1.7-million annual budget for the orthopedic centers inside Afghanistan.

Nearly 20,000 Afghans who lost limbs in the war are mobile again because of the Red Cross centers. But even this is only a start. Surveys by the Red Cross suggest that at least 50,000 Afghan men, women and children have lost legs, many of them both legs.

Although the fighting has stopped in three-quarters of the country, more people are maimed every day by the millions of abandoned mines, grenades and other explosives that explode accidentally.

On virtually every Afghan street, among wraithlike figures moving through early morning mists at this time of the year, there are those moving with the awkward gait of those who have lost their legs, or the use of them. Many have nothing to support them but crude crutches made from scrap lengths of steel piping. Some, with no legs, pull themselves along on scraps of wooden board fashioned into trolleys by nailing wheels taken from pieces of furniture or baggage.

It was to this world that Mr. Cairo came when the 1989 Soviet troop withdrawal made recovery efforts possible. It is work fraught with risk, as the Red Cross learned again last week when six workers at the organization's field hospital in Chechnya were slain in their beds by gunmen. Four of the five nurses who died had worked in Afghanistan, a fact that cast a special pall over the Red Cross headquarters in Kabul when a bulle-

Agence France-Presse for The New York Times

Afghanistan's thousands left disabled by the war have a strong ally in Alberto Cairo, a physiotherapist from Italy, shown kneeling.

tin from Geneva was distributed at breakfasttime on Dec. 17.

As in Chechnya, the work in Afghanistan is carried on in a society ruled by men with scant respect for law or life, and often no knowledge at all of the symbolism of the Red Cross flag that is the only protection the organization offers its staff in violent places like Kabul.

But Mr. Cairo said he could not imagine returning to Italy. In large part, he said, this was because of the character of Afghans. "They are warm like Latins, but at the same time they keep their distance," he said. "They will ask you for something very, very important to them, and when you say 'no,' they don't ask why."

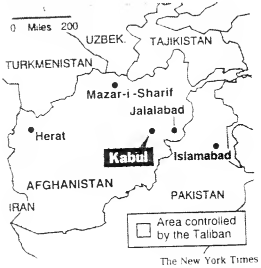
Mr. Cairo's work has been made more difficult recently by the the Taliban religious movement, whose rule in Kabul and elsewhere has included imposing a harsh Islamic social code with severe restrictions on women. Because of a widespread fear among women of venturing into the streets, the numbers of disabled women seeking help at the Kabul center, and of disabled children brought in by their mothers, has fallen.

Otherwise work at the center has continued as before, uninhibited by occasional "inspections" by armed Taliban fighters.

Almost alone in Kabul, the center remains a place where men and women, mostly disabled, can be seen relaxing and working together. In this, as in other things, Mr. Cairo is credited with creating a microcosm of the civil society for which many Afghans yearn, a place that brings together, in an atmosphere full of laughter, people of both sexes, of all ethnic and language groups, and from all factions in the war.

"He has built a small world of affability, generosity and graciousness," said Moheb Ali Yawer, a 25-year-old paraplegic who is Mr. Cairo's aide. Mr. Yawer, who learned most of his English using Red Cross walkie-talkies, chose his words after consulting an English-Persian dictionary, but he needed no help in describing Mr. Cairo.

"Alberto has become a father to the disabled of our country," he said. "If he should ever go away, we would feel lost."



The New York Times

The orthopedic centers are in Kabul and three other cities.

THE NEW YORK TIME
DECEMBER 26, 1996

Kabul stage first sports event since Taliban takeover

From Terence white

KABUL: Fifteen cyclists raced along a main Kabul thoroughfare on Tuesday in a sports event sponsored by the Afghan Olympic committee, the first in the capital since the Taliban takeover.

"We have launched this competition to celebrate the capture of Kabul and to enlighten the people that the Taliban are not against sports," declared Mohammad Ehsan Motmain, secretary-general of the National Olympic Committee.

Before the start of the cycle race a Taliban security official, Mawlavi Bismillah Sahar, also took care to dispel any idea that the Taliban were not in favour of sports.

"This (cycling) will refute enemy propaganda that the Taliban movement is against sports," Sahar added.

This was the first official sporting event organised in Kabul since the Taliban captured the Afghan capital on September 27 last year.

The western media has been fascinated by the Taliban, a little-known Muslim religious movement which rose out of the relative obscurity of the southern Afghan capital Kandahar to seize control of two-thirds of the country.

The Taliban have attracted much foreign attention by their draconian enforcement of a very strictly interpreted form of Islam, which includes a ban on television, music, cinema and women working in public.

The introduction of sports events introduces a lighter side to the ultra-conservative Taliban movement.

"Sport is really good. It will have positive results for the country," Sahar stressed.

The cyle race started near a battle-tank guarding Kabul airport and continued down the straightway to Ariana Square near the Presidential Palace; traffic police cleared the way for the contestants.

The five kilometre (three mile) cycle race was won by 24-year old Mohammad Aman of the National Security Department team, in just under four minutes.

Aman, who began cycling 10 years ago, and gained some international experience in neighbouring Tajikistan, expressed the hope that in the future he might represent Afghanistan at the Olympics.

Motmain, a martial arts expert, later hosted a display of Kung-fu, boxing, wrestling and feats of strength by members of associated sports clubs in a central city high school.

A small crowd of Taliban officials and onlookers were especially impressed when the Kung-fu exponents had rocks smashed by a sledge-hammer on their chest, and their hands.

"These demonstration contests have been organised to show that Kabul youth have a high degree of sports expertise and skills," said an Olympic committee official.

Maulavi Abdurrahman Hotak, a senior Taliban official and patron of sports, spoke at length after the martial arts demonstration.

"We are not against sports. Our athletes should serve the nation and win honour for the country," declared Hotak.

"Our young generation should be capable of competing in every field — cycling, archery and horse-riding," elaborated Hotak.

Afghanistan was represented in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics by two men — a boxer and his coach — both of whom defected to Canada.

NEWS (Pakistan) 1/8

Woodworking shop poised to rebuild war-torn Kabul

By John Stackhouse
TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

KABUL, Afghanistan — At 19, Hakimullah dares to express that rarest of feelings in Kabul: confidence.

Through a European-financed skills-training program, the young carpentry apprentice believes he's on his way to securing a livelihood in a city sapped of aspirations. After six months of training, he already earns more than his father, a government bureaucrat. And he has big plans for the future.

"I will be a carpenter in another two or three months," said Hakimullah, who like many Afghans uses only one name and whose boyish face sports barely enough hair to qualify as a beard under Taleban law. "One day, I plan to have my own shop and earn even more."

In a city ravaged by factional fighting and economic collapse, the center where Hakimullah works has created jobs for 118 carpenters and 240 apprentices and has produced enough doors and windows to jump-start a small building boom next spring — if peace can be sustained.

"It will all depend on security," said Richard Williamson, project manager with German Agro Action, the nongovernmental organization that runs the carpentry program.

While most other aid agencies in Kabul concern themselves with survival issues, the carpentry project runs against the grain.

Rather than waiting for people to start rebuilding their houses, it began this year to produce windows and doors to train a new generation in construction skills. It also pays carpenters and apprentices market rates for every piece they produce.

One year later, in four cavernous workrooms, signs of a beleaguered nation have given way to the buzz of industry and profit as saws hum incessantly and workers scarcely look up from their work.

With a start-up budget equivalent to about $1.2 million, the program has already earned more than $101,000, which is to be reinvested in future work. And Mr. Williamson, a native of Canada, predicted the workshop would be financially self-sufficient next year.

For young men such as Hakimullah, the $12 or so he earns every month from the program's piecework helps support his parents and younger siblings. His father earns only about $7 a month from a job in the Water Ministry — when he's paid at all.

"My entire family depends on this," said Hakimullah, who was born a year before Afghanistan's civil war erupted in the late 1970s.

The project started 14 months ago when Mr. Williamson opened the workshop in a downtown technical college in Kabul while fighting was at a lull. He found a ready wood supply near the city of Jalalabad, and European donors provided electric saws and other equipment.

The workshop was then designed around 118 workstations, each with one carpenter and two apprentices, who split the proceeds of each piece produced.

It seemed like a sure thing. The bombed-out city desperately needed rebuilding, and thousands of young men desperately needed work.

"Our main purpose was to train these students," said Amin Sadiq, the workshop manager.

But just when the workshop was running full tilt, its best customers fled Kabul as the Islamic fundamentalist Taleban movement took over the city. The workshop was left with about 5,000 doors and windows on its hands.

"I still think it is a no-lose proposition," Mr. Williamson said. "At the end of this year, if the project closed, what would we have done? We would have trained a lot of young men with skills they can take anywhere. We would have provided work for them through a pretty lean time."

And 360 men would be too busy for war.

Although the fighting is seldom far from Kabul, Mr. Williamson believes the Taleban-run city will see new construction once homeowners, who have endured more shelling than any other city in the world, smell peace. "If there is security," he said, "we could clear our warehouse almost immediately."

That would provide enough money, about $154,000, to free the workshop from donor support.

Other organizations have already put the workshop to work. As cold winds and snow descend on Kabul, Solidarits, a European relief agency, has ordered $102,000 worth of "sandalis" — traditional wooden foot heaters — to distribute to 3,000 of the city's neediest families.

Under the government of ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani, however, the city's economy last winter was strong enough that many people lined up to buy construction materials and furniture on their own. One contractor from the Panjshir Valley — the stronghold of Mr. Rabbani's defense minister, Ahmad Shah Massoud — placed an order for 2,000 window frames for about $30 each.

The workshop also signed a deal with the government to repair 5,000 school desks whose tops had been used for firewood, and it produced 4,000 cement girders.

Then the Taleban arrived. The Panjshir Valley order evaporated, with only one-quarter of it paid for. The Education Ministry contract was put on hold. Even the government's Construction Ministry ground to a halt.

"After the Taleban took power, all our work stopped. There were no materials," said Akibullah, 28, a father of three and a skilled carpenter. "I had no job. I had nothing."

In the workshop, which buys everything Akibullah can produce, he now earns about $20 a month — a high income in Kabul this winter.

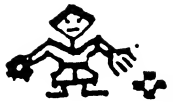
The city's only other wood producers are small shops in the bazaars, which can't fill large orders or provide their workers with steady business. Many of the city's skilled workers have fled to Pakistan or other countries, if they weren't killed in the country's 18-year civil war. And many of the youth, who have grown up in war, can find no other place to learn construction skills.

If the city appears stable next year, the program plans to expand its work to include masonry, plumbing and electrical work, which could create 700 more positions.

"People are eager to rebuild their homes," Mr. Williamson said. "All they are waiting for is security."

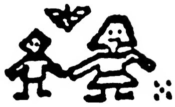
The Washington Times
1/11/97

EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND PLEASURE



One of my most poignant memories of Afghanistan is that of a beautiful teenage girl seated on the verandah of her home mending her little brother's school bag. She rifled through a book, put it in the bag, and in a soft wistful voice said: "Once I could read that." My heart almost broke.

Like so many rural girls - and boys - who went through primary school, Khayriya had lapsed into illiteracy because there was nothing for her to read. During the war years as I watched the education sector develop, the image of that melancholy scene in a village in northern Afghanistan has come to mind over and over again. At the same time, ARIC's Dari and Pashto section grew from nothing into a sizeable collection. But I was not happy. Copies of these books belonged in the hands of populations inside Afghanistan; yet no distribution system existed.



Initial responses to my impassioned crusade were decidedly dim. In fact, the whole idea was largely dismissed as fanciful theorizing. What possible use, I was asked, could be made of reading materials in a nation with such an abysmally low literacy rate? Not so, I countered. During the years of exile countless Afghans were exposed to the benefits of education and many repatriates find the dearth of learning materials frustrating. As a measure of this, one thousand five hundred copies of Dana Magazine sold out in Mazar and Pul-i-Khumri recently - in a single day. A craving for informational and recreational reading materials is clearly evident throughout the country.

One thing about crusaders is that they are stubborn. But stubbornness goes for naught unless receptive minds can be found. I found mine at the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. And, as so often happens, once an idea is accepted, others follow. Austcare, in Australia, and UNICEF also joined in the crusade. With this generous financial support, the ARIC Box Library Extension pilot project, now fondly known as ABLE, was finally launched in September 1996.

Each self-contained box library made of strong galvanized iron is 60 cm. high x 48 cm. wide x 30 cm. deep and weighs 25 kgs. It opens lengthwise and stands by itself. They are filled with approximately 200 Dari and Pashto books, magazines, pamphlets, and posters on subjects ranging from administration to agriculture; mother-child health to animal health care; Islam; history, literature and folktales; children's stories, games and toy making; and a variety of vocational subjects such as carpentry, tailoring, soap making, masonry, and tinsmithy. The aim is not only to provide instructional materials but to encourage the idea that reading can also be entertaining.

ABLE's energetic field supervisor, Mohammad Rafi, who has just returned from an extensive trip across the north, gives instruction on the use of the libraries, particularly regarding the lending policy, a totally new concept in most areas. He also holds discussions with users and potential users. To be effective, ABLE must be sensitive to community interests. Already we are being asked for subjects we had not considered, such as simple books in English, for instance. When asked for subjects on which we have no documents, on beekeeping for one, it is then ABLE's task to encourage others to publish. For this we must also act as advocates for donor funds.

Cooperation and coordination within the varied facets of the project are the keys to ABLE's success. We work through 15 implementing partners, including the Swedish Committee, presently located in 16 provinces. Because of the avid interest that ABLE has created, we have stretched the pilot project from 20 to 27 boxes. Beyond this we cannot go until we succeed in persuading agencies to produce enough multiple copies to fill the boxes. And this depends on cooperation from donors. ABLE's advocacy role thus becomes crucial if we are to meet our ultimate goal of providing a box library for each district in Afghanistan.

from Nancy Hatch Dupree in Peshawar, Janaury 1997

Vol. III, No. 1
December 1996
PeaceWatch
United States Institute of Peace
1550 M Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005-1708

The Future of Afghanistan

It is of pressing importance to regional stability—and to the citizens of Afghanistan—to keep the country from collapsing, say a panel of experts.

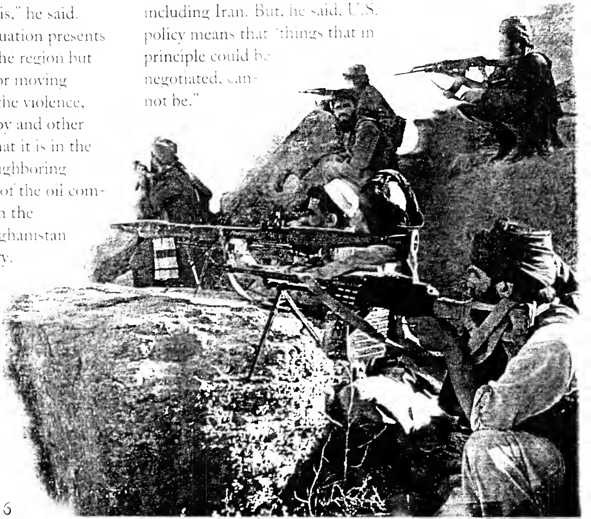
Perhaps what Afghanistan needs is an interim government of technocrats who could act as a central authority to prevent the country from collapsing, says **Ashraf Ghani** of the World Bank. Such an interim government would likely comprise international experts who know the procurement procedures for obtaining international aid and could begin to rebuild Afghanistan "from the bottom up," he says. An effort of this kind could de-politicize the central authority and create incentives for peace among Afghanistan's four main factions, which could keep their district and provincial power bases. "The old formulas for ending the war haven't worked. It's time to explore something new."

A visiting professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, Ghani was one of four panelists discussing "The Future of Afghanistan: The Taliban, Regional Security, and U.S. Foreign Policy" at a U.S. Institute of Peace current issues briefing November 6. Over 140 policymakers, academics, and journalists attended the event, which was organized by **Joseph Klaits**, director of the Jennings Randolph fellowship program, and **John Crist**, program officer. **Robert Oakley** of the National Defense University moderated discussion among the panelists, including **Eden Naby** of Harvard University, **Barnett Rubin** of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Institute senior fellow **Marvin Weinbaum** of the University of Illinois at Urbana.

Panel members said that the taking of Kabul by the Taliban forces and subsequent military and diplomatic developments signal a new phase in the country's 17-year-long conflict. The Taliban militia—founded by fundamentalist refugee students in Pakistan in 1994—had taken control of all but 6 of Afghanistan's 33 provinces in October. They ousted the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and imposed an idiosyncratic, strict Islamic rule in Kabul, the capital city. Ghani noted that bloody battles continue between the Taliban and the forces of the ousted government and its allies, who control the northern part of the country bordering on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. "We have to give the warring factions options and explain why reconstruction is in their interests. Until now, no group has done this," he said.

The current situation presents clear dangers for the region but also possibilities for moving toward an end to the violence, panelists said. Naby and other panelists agreed that it is in the interests of the neighboring powers, as well as of the oil companies operating in the region, to help Afghanistan survive as a country. Weinbaum noted that Afghanistan serves as a land bridge between the Middle East and the former Soviet Union and South Asia, and that adjacent countries have an interest in seeing Afghan refugees on their soil return home. Rubin noted, however, that the U.S. policy of no contact with Iran may inadvertently hinder the resolution of fighting in Afghanistan. Iranian officials have signaled the United States "at a very high level" that they think the two countries have some common interests in Afghanistan, Rubin said. Resolving the conflict in Afghanistan will require cooperation among the regional powers, including Iran. But, he said, U.S. policy means that "things that in principle could be negotiated, cannot be."

Fighters of the Taliban militia take a position on the outskirts of Afghanistan's Laghman province in September. Later that day, they captured the province's capital city, Mehtar Lam.



Dealers circle like vultures

Organised plunder of works from the Kabul Museum while national and international attempts are made to recover the collection

LONDON. Most of the finest pieces from the Kabul Museum have already left Afghanistan, smuggled over the mountains to Pakistan. There they are sold through contacts made in the bazaars of Peshawar (the frontier town near the Khyber Pass), Karachi or the capital Islamabad. They then usually go on to Europe, America and Japan.

The looting is well organised, according to Jolyon Lelie, a UN representative in Kabul who has monitored the trade. Earlier this year he reported: "Once the news of the state of the Kabul Museum surfaced, the demand abroad for pieces from the collection drove the looting. It was evident that the intruders know exactly what they were looking for. As the most portable objects (coins) and those of the highest value (the ivories) disappeared, the looters have become ever more audacious".

Three organisations have been set up to help recover looted works from the museum collection: The National Commission for the Preservation and Retrieval of Afghanistan's Cultural and Historical Heritage, Kabul. Established by concerned Afghani, it has already acquired over 1,000 objects looted, half from the museum and the remainder from illegal excavations. The Commission's role under the new Taliban regime remains unclear.

The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, Pakistan (fax: +92 521 840 471). Established by Afghan specialist Nancy Dupree, it played a key role in assisting the recent evacuation of the museum collection.

The International Committee for the Salvation of the Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan. California (fax: +1 310 550 5034). Its president is Mehria Mustamandy and it was set up under the patronage of the Pacific Asia Museum (with the support of museum director David Kamansky).

One idea that has been discussed privately is the possibility of buying up looted artworks which come onto the market, with a view to collecting them and returning them to Kabul when the political situation is stabilised. Objects could be kept at a foreign museum, where they would be accessible (or possibly sent on a touring exhibition to draw attention to the plight of Afghanistan).

Engraved ivory panel from Begram, first or second century AD. Not a single intact ivory survives in the Kabul Museum

Although museum and reputable collectors would normally refuse to buy looted artworks, our inquiries suggest there is growing support for the idea in the special circumstances of Afghanistan. But some problems remain to be resolved.

First, money needs to be raised and prices of the important items are very high. Few museums have available funds, and even if there was the money, it would be difficult to buy works not destined for their permanent collection. It might therefore be necessary to rely on wealthy and sympathetic philanthropists.

Second, there is the danger that publicity surrounding a recovery operation would fuel the market and encourage further looting (although it could be argued that there is now relatively little left to take in Afghanistan).

Third, it would be difficult to lay down the precise conditions under which artworks should be sent back to Kabul. New owners would be reluctant to return them without strong assurances that they would be completely safe in Afghanistan. That day looks a long way off.

M.B.

The history of a museum on the front line

The Kabul Museum, founded in 1919, was moved to Darulaman twelve years later. It was one of the most important museums in Asia and ninety percent of its exhibits came from scientifically excavated sites. Initially these digs were undertaken by the Délégation archéologique Française en Afghanistan (with finds divided between the Kabul Museum and the Musée Guimet). In the 1960s the French archaeologists were joined by others, including the British Institute of Afghan Studies at Kandahar, an American team from the Smithsonian institution in Sistan, and the Italian Instituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente at Ghazni.

After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 there were reports that the museum treasures had been removed to Russia, but it later emerged that nothing had gone. It was only after the subsequent Mujahideen takeover of Kabul in 1992 that the cultural catastrophe began.

Based at Darulaman, the Kabul Museum has been on the front line. In May 1993 the museum was seized from government troops by the Hezbe Wahdat Faction. Days later the building was subjected to a rocket attack from government forces, destroying a fourth-century wall painting from Delbarjintepe and burying much of the museum's ancient pottery under debris. Islamic bronzes melted in the resulting fire.

With part of the building breached, a spate of looting followed. In January 1994 a UN-backed operation led to the bricking up of all ground-floor entrances. The badly damaged upper floor was weather proofed and steel doors installed inside. Nearly 4,000 museum pieces were recovered from the debris.

In July 1994 the Hezbe Wahdat militia took over the area around the museum, with the Hezbe Islami faction assuming control over the heights overlooking Darulaman. There was constant fighting which worsened in 1995. Guards were posted at the museum by whichever faction was in power and with each changeover, the fleeing troops took what they could. Metal doors were blown open, and the boxes inside prised apart. Meanwhile the Taliban were getting closer to Kabul. On 10 October, 1995 a Taliban rocket fell in the museum entrance, just missing the building, but shattering a Kushan stone head of a lion. A month later, on 16 November, another rocket exploded just outside the wall of the museum. Evacuation now seemed essential, but with the pressures of war, it was to take nearly a year.

M.B.

The Art Newspaper is published monthly except August by Umberto Allemandi & Co. Publishing, London
ISSN 0960-6556
Publisher Umberto Allemandi

More from this publication in the next issue.

Gemstones of Afghanistan

On 12 June, with both a slide show and gem display, gemologist Gary W. Bowersox presented the highlights of his work in Afghanistan. For the past 23 years, Bowersox and his wife, Bonita Chamberlin, a paleontologist, have ventured throughout Afghanistan and the surrounding region hunting for gems, helping the local people develop mining skills, and becoming experts on the mines of the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan's fabled mountain range. Their recent book, *Gemstones of Afghanistan* (Geoscience Press, 1995), offers spectacular photographs and text that includes valuable information for everyone from the gemologist or historian to the merely inquisitive.

Discussing the region's geology, Bowersox explained the importance of the slow collision of the European and Indian land masses. This process contributes to the region's abundance of minerals which, over time, combine to form gemstones. Bowersox explained that it is a combination of chrome from the ocean and beryllium from the land that forms Afghanistan's extraordinary emeralds. Trapped inside the mountains, the unventilated chrome and beryllium mix with carbon monoxide to produce emeralds of Colombian quality. In addition to emeralds, Afghanistan is rich in amethyst, diamonds, gold, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires, spinels, tourmaline, and a variety of quartz.

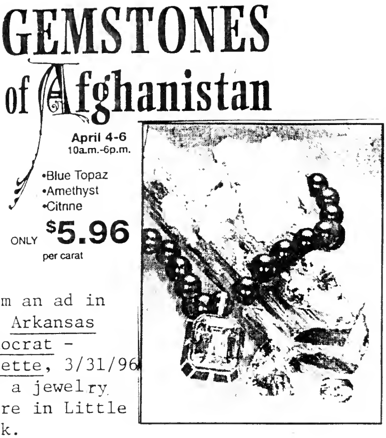
The wealth of these reserves is impressive; between 1982 and 1992 the value of gemstones produced in Afghanistan rose from $0.5 million to over $20 million. The potential demonstrated by these figures is something which Bowersox believes is worth tapping. He offered his view of how the gem mining industry could aid in the economic and political development of Afghanistan. Mining gems could "kickstart" the economy by providing funds for investment in the country's physical and economic infrastructure. Bowersox expects that economic stability and political independence would follow once the country became capable of the next step: mineral mining.

Bowersox would like to see a large-scale training program in Afghanistan to improve mining technology and technique. In the seminars and symposia that he and his wife have already conducted, participants from Afghan villages have learned how to recognize valuable gemstones native to their environment. The accessibility of many of the stones makes it possible for villagers, even children, to search for them easily. This is key to Bowersox' belief that mining gemstones should come first in the building of the Afghan economy: the necessary natural and human resources are readily available.

Bowersox' references to the maps of Marco Polo and to the 6,500-year-old lapis lazuli trade emphasized the historical legacy of Afghan gemstones. In more recent history, wartime crossings of the difficult terrain of the Pakistani-Afghan border have earned for Bowersox and his wife the nicknames Mr. and Mrs. Indiana Jones. Ironically, explosions of war that have caused so much destruction in Afghanistan have also unearthed many new mines.

After the program, MEI's audience bought signed copies of *Gemstones of Afghanistan* and examined rough and cut gemstones, including a $3,900 necklace that featured kunzite, a gem which is the natural source of the drug lithium.

MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER
Vol. 47, #5. September 1996


GEMSTONES of Afghanistan

April 4-6
10a.m.-6p.m.

•Blue Topaz
•Amethyst
•Citrine

ONLY $5.96 per carat

From an ad in the Arkansas Democrat - Gazette, 3/31/96 for a jewelry store in Little Rock.

CHRONOLOGY - continued from p. 4

1/30 - Reuters - Masood reportedly has moved his headquarters to Andarab, between the Panjsher Valley & the Salang Pass.
- The Afghanistan Red Crescent Society has issued an urgent appeal for int'l aid as huge numbers of people in Kabul are in an "awful state." The city's plight has worsened in the last 2 weeks as tens of thousands of refugees have poured into the city from the north. There is food in the markets, but rapid inflation & widespread unemployment puts it out of reach of many, who can not afford to buy fuel to cook what little food they have..

2/2 - Associated Press - Soldiers loyal to Shiite leader Karim Khalili have massed in mountains north of Kabul to stop the Taliban advance. However, Agence France Press reports that the locals in 2 districts in Wardak have revolted against Khalili who heads Hezb-i-Wahdat. Taliban says it intends to capture Bamiyan before attacking Dostam in the north. Reuters reports that the Taleban are threatening Bamiyan from 3 directions - Ghor to the west, Wardak to the south & the Ghorband Valley to the east.

Afghan Restaurant Offers Exotica for Frugal

By RICHARD JAY SCHOLEM

THRIFTY diners, determined to get their money's worth, should take note of the proliferation of Afghani restaurants. Although their increasing numbers do not constitute an invasion, few areas of Nassau and Suffolk are now without one of these bargain-basement storefront spots.

Typical is the newest, the two-month-old **Aria Afghan Cuisine** in East Meadow (579-2010), a tiny oasis in a shopping center at 2320 Hempstead Turnpike. Situated between a Baskin-Robbins and a unisex haircutter, it offers Long Island-style exotica for the frugal.

Only one entree costs more than $10 (it's $10.95) and a number are priced at $7.50. Middle Eastern music, with echoes of the Orient, plays discreetly in the background as a smiling waiter from Kabul, wearing a silver earring, serves warm, wonderful, flat Afghani bread.

The simple multishaded green milieu, with its silk flowers, carpets and mirrored wall, is a soothing world apart from the roaring traffic outside. There is a shaker of ground sour grapes along with the salt, pepper, coriander and red pepper sauces on each table.

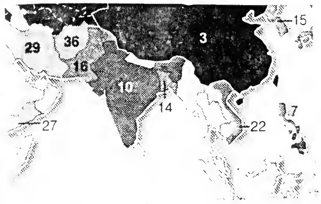
A little green salad with a creamy mayonnaise-based dressing unexpectedly appears shortly after the breadbasket arrives. Bulani ($2.50), four deep-fried ravioli-shaped turnovers filled with warm savory pumpkin paste and escorted by a yogurt dipping sauce, provide an unusual and satisfying treat with or without the sauce. And a tomatoey aush, Afghanistan's answer to minestrone, with fresh noodles, chick peas, kidney beans and diverse spices, is a substantial soup especially suitable for fall and winter slurping.

Rice at Aria, whether white or brown basmati, is a fluffy lighter-than-air pleasure. Dal Chalow ($7.95), tiny delicious orange-red lentils cooked into the consistency of a mash, is perfect with the long-grained white rice, which adheres to it. Basmati rice is paired with kabab barg ($9.50), a tasty though chewy strip of medium-rare lamb, and kofta kabab ($8.50), a cylinder of ground beef alive with freshly-grated spices. The two kababs are available on a combination plate called Sultani kabab for $10.95.

Fernee ($2.50), a refreshing, cool milk pudding or custard laced with crushed pistachio, will especially appeal to those who fondly remember the junket pudding of old. But a rather bizarre native drink called doogh ($1), which combines yogurt, milk, club soda and who knows what else, tasted a bit like spoiled buttermilk or perhaps the product of a cantankerous yak. Next time I will stick with green tea or revert to diet cola. But there will be a next time, for Aria Afghan Cuisine, with its Asian and

NYT (Long Island Ed.) 9/29

Afghanistan is #36 on a list of the top 40 countries whose emigrants have come to New York City legally.
NYT 1/12/97



36. Afghanistan 2,107

PASHTO GUIDE

By. M.G. Watanpal Dayani

پښتو ژبه

LINDSAY MALAKZAI - U.S.A

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

DAWAT

Contemporary guides to the Pashto languages have not been readily available, until now. M.G. Watanpal Dayani has written a concise, clear introduction to the Pashto language that will provide a useful study aid to anyone aiming to learn spoken and written Pashto. With 194 pages the book is light to carry and the quality of print enables easy reading of the English and Pashto script. Guides to Pashto grammar and vocabulary began to be written (as early as the 17th and 18th centuries.) as merchants, scholars and adventurers travelled through Afghanistan. The unsuccessful efforts of Russia and Britain to dominate politically in the region spurred those countries to employ linguists to study the languages of Afghanistan in the 1800's. In the "Pashto Manual" written by Major H.G. Raverty in 1880, exercises include translations such as "The enemy have all crossed over to the other side of the Logar river" and "Whenever thou mayest meet with a good sword, buy it for me." Watanpal Dayani's Pashto Guide brings us into the 1990's with relevant vocabulary and modern linguistic terminology.

The Pashto Guide begins with a listing of the Pashto alphabet and the corresponding pronunciation, followed by the changes that occur in the written letter according to the position in the word. The guide progressively introduces each grammatical word type, for example noun, pronoun, verb, and examples of sentence construction. Sets of vocabulary in each section support reading and writing exercises. A guide to pronunciation is provided for each new vocabulary item. This guide has added interest due to the inclusion of short written paragraphs about eminent Afghan's, a brief discussion of the origins of the Afghan languages and a short chronology would be an indication of the location of the primary word stress, because the native speakers of English applies different stress patterns than the native speaker of Pashto. Inaccurate stress patterns make it difficult for the learner to be understood when using their newly acquired Pashto language. The layout of the guide is easy to follow except the section on plural nouns is several sections after the section on singular nouns. Overall, for anyone needing an introduction to spoken and written Pashto, this is an excellent book. The potential users are English speakers working among Afghan people, travelers, linguists and scholars of Afghan culture, sociology and history, and children of the many Afghan families separated from their homeland and needing a resource for improving skills in Pashto while attending school in a different language medium. Watanpal Dayani is to be commended for this contribution to the students of the Pashto language.

For information on how to obtain a copy of "PASHTO DUIDE" by M.G. Watanpal Dayani contact DAWAT.

P.O.Box # 289, 2001 Lillestrom, NORWAY
Tel. 63 87 59 71 تليفون:
Fax. 63 87 59 71 فكس:

Vol. 65-66 #5
Sept. 1996

From a REUTERS report, 1/27:

A UN mission reported that 3,500 people remained in the town of Charikar, 1,750 in Istalif, 1,400 in Karabagh, 700 in Khalaka & 700 in Sri-i-Khuja. Most of them were too poor, old or sick to leave. Heavy fighting in Badghis over the past 3 months has led to the displacement of 40,000 to 50,000 people, but around 11,000 people are still around the front lines. The UNOCHA office said that as many as 4 children a day were dying as a result of cold & hunger in the Sang-i-Atash area in northwestern Badghis. Taleban has promised to help in relief distribution.

12/31 - The Times - San Francisco - Prisoners of war put on display Monday by their Taliban captors said they were caught sleeping when Taliban troops launched a blistering weekend offensive.

When fighting subsided late Saturday, the Taliban Islamic militia had taken 250 prisoners and pushed the front line from 10 miles to 25 miles north of Kabul.

Among the prisoners was Abdul Sabur Khinjeh, who commanded 300 men. Khinjeh said he has 40 Taliban prisoners at his headquarters in the Panjshir Valley, the stronghold of the former Afghan government's military chief, Ahmed Shah Massood.

Taliban troops say they killed 60 enemy soldiers, took control of Qarabaq and Stalif, about 25 miles north of Kabul, and have laid siege to the strategic air base at Baghram, several miles farther north.

1/5 - The Nation (Pakistan)- Prayers for rain will be offered throughout the Taliban controlled parts of Afghanistan at 9 a.m. local time. (CBS news reported this on 1/6, adding that 40 years ago, then-King Zaher Shah called for prayers to stop heavy rains. The rain stopped.)(See 1/6)

1/6 - Washington Post - Dostum's warplanes bombed Kabul, killing at least 7 & wounding 69. A separate bomb blast in a Kabul market killed 3 & injured 37. The NYT, in a similar report, added that tens of thousands had gathered at 4 sites to pray for rain at the request of Mullah Moh'd Omar.

1/7 - The Muslim (Pakistan) - The Nangarhar Taleban is allowing men to attend classes in the medical college in Jalalabad since it reopened after a 3-month closure, but women are still prevented from entering.

1/13 - The Nation (Pakistan) - In Peshawar: On Saturday last, Haji Abdul Qadeer Khan presided over a meeting of his scattered colleagues and countrymen. Besides others the meeting was attended by Haji Zaman, Engineer Ghaffar and Maulvi Hayat Ullah. The meeting after a thread-bare debate, decided to restore the eastern Shura with Haji Abdul Qadeer as its head

1/15 - News (Pakistan) - The Afghani has depreciated 10 times during the past few days. The head of the Afghan Nat'l Bank, Maulvi Ehsanullah Ehsan, blamed the ousted gov't. He said the former gov't had printed a lot of notes. The devaluation has multiplied the miseries of Kabul citizens as prices have increased excessively.

1/21 - Reuters - Taleban has sent a delegation to Iran, perhaps an attempt to improve strained relations. Iran has offered to host peace talks but wants all the Afghan factions to be included in the talks. The UN said the Iran proposal was not part of the UN negotiating process.

1/22 - News (Pakistan) - Fake degrees from war-shattered Afghan medical colleges are on sale in the NWFP's Khyber Agency for Rs. 20,000 each. Prices for Afghan passports vary.

The MD degrees are believed to have been taken out of the country after the fall of Dr Najibullah government when mujahideen took over the Afghan capital in April 1992.

It is learnt that several mujahideen commanders were involved in the illegal business as they forced the concerned staff of the institutions to sign the blank degrees at gun point.

Taliban, sources were searching for those involved in the business as the students militia have already nabbed some Afghans and recovered fake documents from their possession.

Frontier government has also decided not to accept the MD degree of those students who secured it from Afghanistan after 1992. But the problem is that any date and any year could be mentioned in the degrees having only the signature of the heads of the respective institutions.

1/22 - The Muslim (Pakistan) - A major conference on Afghanistan opened in Ashkabad, Tajikistan. (See p. 13)

1/24 - WSJ - Taleban fought to within 13 miles of the Salang tunnel. However, the US said it would not grant recognition to the new rulers.

1/27 - Dawn (Pakistan, via Internet) - Taleban captured the Shinwari & Siagird districts in the Ghorband valley. The area had been under the control of Abdul Karim Khalili of the Hezb-i-Wahdat. Taliban has recently captured Jabul-Seraj, Bagram air base, Charikar city & Gulbahar & is expelling most of the non-Pashtoon residents from the Gulbahar district to prevent any attempted uprising.

- Washington Post (via Internet) - Dostum blew up part of the Salang Highway in an attempt to stop the Taliban advance. Taliban has offered a ceasefire but only if the opponents drop their demand to share power. Taliban has captured 3 districts in Kapisa province. The forced exodus of villagers, primarily Tajiks, continues & an estimated 15,000 refugees have reached Kabul. Reuters adds that many of the refugees have Dostum's banknotes, which are not valid in Kabul.

Chronology continues on p. 48.

Images of War, Made Graceful on a Rug

PROPERTY OF ACKU

By MARIANNE ROHRLICH

PEERING at a Baluchi rug made in Afghanistan or Pakistan, one can see flowers, trees, mountains — and a rifle. It's possible to spot a helicopter between two mountains. But what about that hand grenade masquerading as a flower? Or that jagged abstract design?

It's a Kalashnikov AK-47 rifle, upright.

Some of the rugs that are fast disappearing into the hands of collectors bring to mind place mats for children — the ones that ask, "What's wrong with this picture?"

But there's nothing innocent about the war rugs.

War iconography first appeared in these tribal rugs in 1980, shortly after the Soviets began bombing Afghan villages. Mohammad Raheem, an Afghan refugee and a rug producer and dealer in the city of Peshawar in western Pakistan, traces the earliest war rugs to tribal women of Afghanistan, who wove their resistance into designs handed down for centuries. Images of tanks and warplanes, Ak-47's (used by Soviet soldiers) and American-made M-16 rifles (used by Afghan insurgents) began to appear in the rugs.

Saul Borodofsky, a rug historian from Charlottesville, Va., called the rugs "the only genre of Oriental rug design about which there is no argument as to what the configurations mean, who made them and when they were introduced."

The rugs started as a spontaneous narrative of life in a war-torn country. But their success with journalists, dealers and Soviet soldiers, who exchanged weapons for rugs, prompted middlemen to set up production sites in refugee camps in Pakistan, where men also started weaving.

Mr. Raheem said that since the war ended in 1989, weaving of war rugs has ceased in the villages and only a few refugee camps produce them. Each rug takes several weeks to create.

As the supply of rugs has dwindled, their popularity has grown. The rugs, usually no bigger than 4 by 6 feet and often the size of bathmats, are available in Manhattan. Prices start at $50 and rarely go above $1,000.

Rosalin Candlin Benedict, a dealer, appraiser and historian in New Preston, Conn., said the rugs are valued as contemporary folk art or woven historical documents, not as fine carpets. As with any kind of Oriental rug, she said, only 3 or 4 of every 100 are superior.

Violence is no stranger to textile design in the West — consider the battle scenes in the Bayeux Tapestry, a medieval weaving. But Paul O'Bannon, of Tucson, Ariz., the author of six books on Oriental rugs, said that these rugs were the first to reflect contemporary war images in the weaving. He said he viewed them as "psychodrama."

Some collectors favor strong graphics: the cartoonlike patterns of large guns and other heavy war equipment, the English and Cyrillic letters from artillery or foreign military posters. The most collectible rugs are subtle, however, with war motifs folded gracefully into the traditional designs with hand-spun wool warps.

Who would want to live with such imagery? Robert Simko, a Manhattan photographer, was browsing through some of the rugs at ABC Carpet and Home last week. He likened the rugs to books that could help teach his children about war.

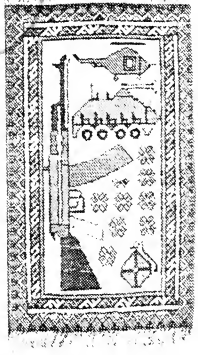
And Mr. Borodofsky said that one of his customers told him he would enjoy "wiping his feet" on the Soviet war machine, at least pictorially.

Are war rugs important? Tatiana Divens, a military equipment expert in Washington, answered the question in an article in the December 1988/January 1989 issue of Oriental Rug Review. "Yes," she wrote. "They capture the horror of the war in the only way the weaver knew — with wool and her fingers. Are they things of beauty? In the eyes of this beholder, you bet!"

●

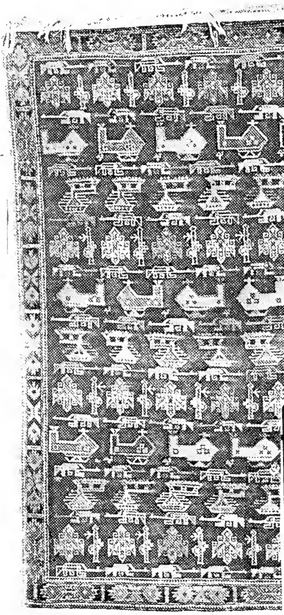
Sources for Afghan war rugs in Manhattan include Craft Caravan, 63 Greene Street (Spring Street); ABC Carpet and Home, 888 Broadway (19th Street), and the Rug Warehouse, 220 West 80th Street.

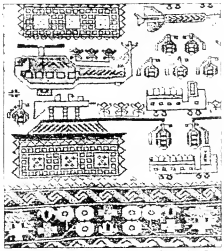
THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 1997



David Corio for The New York Times

Tools of war, woven into an Afghan rug.

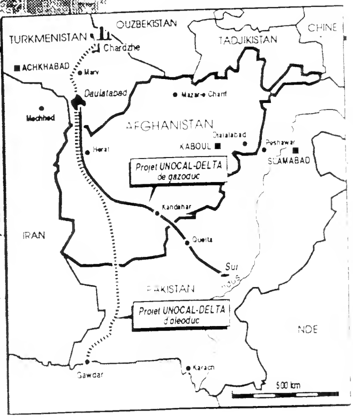




Photographs by Naum Kazhdan/The New York Times

Afghan war rugs, a woven history of the Soviet invasion, are becoming collectible.

ECONOMICS



LES NOUVELLES D'AFGHANISTAN #74-75 had this map showing the potential pipeline routes through Afghanistan.

Afghan Life Under Taliban: Don't Clap at Games

By John Zubrzycki
Special to The Christian Science Monitor

KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN

ON most afternoons, Mohammad Hassan, the governor of Kandahar Province and a dominant mullah, can be found seated over a cup of green tea and a bowl of boiled sweets on the sun-drenched veranda of the Taliban guest house.

A battered old Buick covered in a coat of khaki-colored dust lies abandoned in a corner of the garden – a relic of another Afghanistan that 17 years of civil war and now a takeover by a radical Islamic group called the Taliban have all but wiped out.

The Taliban take their name from an Arabic term for religious students. Most are poorly educated and their vision for the country is a narrow, mosque-centered society modeled on village life. In the 75 percent of the country they have conquered since 1994, they have imposed a lifestyle based on a strict interpretation of the Koran that may take the country back centuries.

Mullah Hassan is one of the most powerful leaders of the strict Islamic militia. But there are no guards to frisk the endless stream of visitors wanting to see him. This is the realm of the Taliban and harsh rules of justice threaten anyone who violates the security of the city or dares transgress the *sharia* or Islamic law.

"The problems of Afghanistan were the result of the people not following ... Islam," the mullah says. "What we are doing here is building a pure Islamic state, according to the Koran."

According to the traditions of the Pathan ethnic group, to which most of the fighters belong, the governor must attend to every guest. To reject them, or fail to offer protection, help, or guidance even in the most trivial of matters, would be unworthy of his status. Wearing a black silk turban, the former commander puts his artificial leg, a legacy of a Soviet attack, to one side as Taliban officials arrive in an incongruous caravan of Toyota pickups and Land Cruisers.

After many bear hugs and handshakes, Mullah Hassan scribbles a note promising funds for the war effort or a small development project and then sends the petitioner away. "We have restored law and order to the parts of Afghanistan we control. That is why the people support us," he says.

Kandahar, the group's headquarters, has been under the control of the Taliban for the past two years, longer than any other city in Afghanistan. It's a wo-day drive to the nearest front line, so there are few soldiers carrying guns. Only the steady tream of war wounded arriving at Mirwais Hospital serves as a reminder of the ongoing fighting or control of the strategic roads leading north rom the capital, Kabul. The Taliban took over Kabul in September and are now trying to take over the rest of the country.

Superficially, Kandahar bears many of the hallmarks of the Taliban's radical ideology. Music is banned and only the mullah's call to prayer rises above the cacophony of street sounds in the city's crowded bazaars. Women must be clad from head to foot in *burkhas*, men are not allowed to shave, thieves have their right arm and left leg amputated, and adulterers are stoned to death.

But women can walk alone or in small groups through the war-ravaged streets. Strictly segregated training in tailoring and embroidery for ladies is being allowed, but only under the supervision of other women. Even sports like soccer are tolerated, although cheering and clapping at games draws a sharp rebuke from the mullahs.

"This is only propaganda," says acting foreign minister, Mullah Mohammad Ghaus, responding to a question about the violation of women's rights by the Taliban. "You have been to the bazaars and have seen women out alone. We have not closed girls' schools forever. If they are closed it would not be good for the people of Afghanistan," he says. In the parts of Afghanistan controlled by them, the Taliban clerics have decreed that women cannot work outside their homes or go out alone, and girls have been expelled from schools and colleges.

Until the Taliban controls the whole country either by military conquest or through negotiations, he says, they cannot divert scarce resources to rebuild a segregated education system. The ban on women working is necessary, he says, and will be lifted once peace is restored.

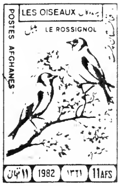
DAVE HERRING – STAFF

When put into the context of recent Afghan history, it isn't surprising that these rigid strictures, which even the Taliban admit go beyond the bounds of Islamic law, have some support among the residents here.

"Prior to [the Taliban] takeover, there were four rival [rebel] groups fighting for control of the city – murdering, raping, and abducting citizens at will. What right have foreign countries to tell us how to run our society," says Abdul Rahman, a shopkeeper.

Kandahar was an empty shell when the Taliban wrested control in November 1994. Today the city is one of the fastest growing in Afghanistan thanks to its strategic position on the trade routes between Central Asia, Iran, and the markets of Pakistan.

Thousands of refugees have returned, although many, like Humayun Mohammand have kept their wives and children in Pakistan so that they can work and receive an education. "Peace has returned to Kandahar, so why can't the Taliban regime reopen the schools? What life is there for my children if they cannot get an education?"



"We cannot have elections straightaway in these circumstances. We will make a [ruling council] and then let the people decide what they want," says Mullah Ghaus, the foreign minister.

The Taliban response is that theirs is only a caretaker administration that will eventually make way for a more permanent government. But just how that transition will take place has not been spelled out in detail.

CSM 12/11

At an Afghan Execution: It's Swift and Personal

By JOHN F. BURNS

KABUL, Afghanistan, Dec. 18 — When it came time for Ghulam Mohammed to die today, he raised his eyes toward the deep blue Afghan sky. Then he stretched his bound hands out before him, palms upward, and gestured swiftly up and down, as though toward heaven.

Amid the murmuring of the crowd, it was impossible to hear the words that came tumbling from Mr. Mohammed, who was about to become the first person to be publicly executed in Kabul since the Taliban religious movement captured the Afghan capital 12 weeks ago. He might have been praying or he might have been making a last desperate plea for mercy from the man advancing toward him with a raised Kalashnikov rifle.

Under the Sharia, the Islamic code of justice imposed by the Taliban in the three-quarters of Afghanistan under their control, Mr. Mohammed was entitled to entreat his executioner for a reprieve. And the executioner, whose pregnant wife and three small children Mr. Mohammed was convicted of killing last year, was entitled to forgive the condemned man. In that case, Mr. Mohammed would have walked a free man from the Kabul soccerfield that had been declared his place of execution on this chilly winter day.

But the bereaved man, Mohammed Alif, had waited for this moment ever since the evening last December when he arrived home to find his entire family slain. So he walked the last few paces briskly, dropped to one knee, leveled the automatic rifle at Mr. Mohammed standing 30 paces away, and fired. As the two-second burst stuttered across the field, the crowd of 3,000 men, almost all hardened Taliban fighters, broke out with something like a stifled cheer, a dull "ha, ha, ha" that seemed like a counterpoint to the bullets that struck Mr. Mohammed.

Mr. Mohammed fell backwards, arms akimbo, and lay quite still, filigreed cotton skullcap still in place. But a Taliban cleric walked forward, glanced down at the fallen man, and beckoned Mr. Alif forward. To insure that Mr. Mohammed could not have survived, Mr. Alif stood at his victim's flank, pointed the rifle at his chest, and fired another two-second burst through Mr. Mohammed's traditional knee-length shirt. The body twitched, the crowd offered another stifled cheer, and a doctor examined the fallen man to verify the execution was complete.

For the Taliban, the grim tableau seemed both a celebration of their unbridled power and the triumph of their form of Islamic radicalism. By chance or not, the point on the soccer field where Mr. Mohammed died, is about 150 paces from the concrete traffic post where, at first light 83 days before, the Taliban began their conquest of Kabul by castrating, shooting and finally hanging the last Communist President of Afghanistan, Najibullah.

If that event shocked a world inured to the violence that has blighted Afghanistan for a generation, it set the tone for what followed. Taliban leaders, mostly village men indifferent or hostile to the yearning among many people in Kabul for a more tolerant life, set about imposing a rigid social code that forbade women to work, closed all schools for girls, and issued a host of other edicts that made Kabul a sprawling urban version of an Afghan village, where attitudes towards women and pleasure have altered little since the days of medieval kings.

The hope of many in Kabul, and of the small community of foreign aid workers who have tried to alleviate the hunger and hopelessness that endless cycles of war have brought to many in this city of more than a million people, was that taking power in the capital would somehow temper the Taliban. It was a hope that found an echo as far away as Washington, where Clinton Administration officials, after suspending diplomatic contacts with the Taliban in protest against the movement's harsh start in Kabul, began saying by mid-November that the world should "engage with" the Taliban if it wished to moderate their policies.

Some in Kabul still cling to similar hopes, but they are fewer by the week as the Taliban entrench their control. A military counter-offensive by two allied armies of more moderate Muslims has stalled north of Kabul, and been driven back beyond artillery range. Taliban pledges in October to review the ban on women working have come to nothing, and the ban has even been reinforced in recent days by a decree warning "our Afghan sisters" against any attempt to seek work with foreign aid organizations, a favored employer among the 150,000 women who worked in the capital until the Taliban takeover.

"Otherwise, if they are chased, threatened and investigated by us, the responsibility will be on them," the decree declared, according to an English translation that was delivered on Monday to offices of the United Nations, the Red Cross and a score of private aid organizations that have offices here. The decree was issued by the Office for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice, which operates as a sort of religious police.

Last week, the same organization boasted over Radio Shariat, the Taliban station, that Taliban men had "beaten" 250 women on Kabul streets in a single day for breaking the dress code, which requires the wearing of a head-to-toe shroud with a lace grille over the eyes that is known here as a burqa.

In the circumstances, the choice of a soccer field for today's execution seemed apt. Soccer has been banned by the Taliban, along with cards, any public displays of affection between men and women, and the playing of anything but religious music. Where soccer enthusiasts once gathered on an earthen embankment beside the high school field, there were serried ranks of Taliban, identifiable by their ubiquitous Kalashnikovs and the long-tailed turbans that are the native dress in Kandahar, the ultra-conservative southern city from which the Taliban movement arose in 1994.

Before the execution, a Taliban mullah, his words amplified by a loudspeaker truck, said it was a special day for Kabul. "Today we carry out the first execution in our capital under the rule of the Taliban Islamic Movement of Afghanistan," he said. "Let this be a lesson for others." After listing the range of Sharia punishments for wrongdoers, including amputations, stonings and lashings for unmarried couples engaging in sex, he promised that Afghanistan's 16 million people would soon experience Taliban rule. "In a short time, we will impose our Islamic law in all of Afghanistan," he said.

A decree of the Taliban's Supreme Court read at the execution detailed Mr. Mohammed's crime, saying that he, another man named Rohullah and a 15-year-old girl, Roya, had broken into the Alif family's apartment in a Soviet-built housing complex on the airport road and used rope to garrot Mr. Alif's pregnant wife and three children, a boy and two girls aged 9, 6 and 3. Neighbors said later that Roya, seeking money for her wedding to a teen-age boyfriend, had enticed Mr. Mohammed and Rohullah into the robbery after she learned that Mr. Alif, a part-time money-changer, kept piles of banknotes valued at about $1,000 in the apartment.

Dr. Mohammed Alam, a 26-year-old physician who attended the execution and spoke later for the Taliban said the two men had been sentenced to death earlier this year by the Government of President Burnahuddin Rabbani, ousted by the Taliban in September. Roya received a three-year jail term because of her youth. But he said that all three had escaped when jail warders abandoned Kabul's prisons to join the exodus of Rabbani officials on the night the Taliban entered the capital. Only one, Mr. Mohammed, had been caught, in early November, and his death sentence had been reviewed and confirmed by a Taliban court.

Mr. Alif, the executioner, told Taliban fighters who gathered around him after the shooting that he was pleased to have been given his rights under "qisas," an Arabic term meaning a relative's right of revenge. "But I will not be fully satisfied until the other criminals have been caught,"he said.

If their families gave the offenders up, he said, he would consider exercising his right for forgiveness, but if they did not, he would insist on the full punishment, at least against Rohullah, the second of the condemned men. "It is my right under qisas," he said.

When Dr. Alam, the physician, was asked what he thought of the condemnation of the Taliban in the West for exacting medieval forms of punishment, he became agitated and cut off the exchange. Then he turned back, shaking his finger, and said that Westerners were in no position to judge. "You have no qisas in the United States, and none in Europe," he said, his voice rising. "And look what you have — a lot of women raped every day, and a lot of people murdered."

THE NEW YORK TIMES

DECEMBER 19, 1996

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19 1996

Public execution signals Taliban justice in Kabul

KABUL, Afghanistan — Shielding his face in fear, a convicted murderer crumpled to the ground in a burst of automatic gunfire — shot by the husband of the pregnant woman he killed. A thousand people gathered yesterday to watch justice in Afghanistan's capital, Taliban-style.

Ghulam Mahmad's corpse, clad in a brown, loosefitting traditional Afghan suit, was driven off in a white pickup guarded by five members of the religious Taliban militia. His bare feet dangled off the end.

It was not the first public execution in Kabul — the Taliban hung former President Najibullah and his brother in a public square Sept. 27, the day they took the capital. But it was the first here under the new rulers' strict version of the Islamic legal process, which includes victim retribution.

Under a cloud-filtered winter sun, Mohammed Alif knelt and took aim at the 30-year-old killer of his pregnant wife and their three children.

Mahmad lifted his arms against the spray of bullets. Standing over his prone body, Alif fired a second burst.

"This is the first time someone has been punished in Kabul according to Islamic law," Mohammed Alam, the Information Ministry spokesman, said minutes after the shooting.

"We want to impose total peace and security."

That means execution by firing squad for murderers, death by stoning for adulterers, amputating the hands of thieves, and 100 lashes for those who engage in illicit sex, Alam said.

Since driving former government forces out of Kabul, the Taliban have kept girls from going to school, banned women from work, and beaten women who appear in public not totally covered.

These prohibitions, along with public executions, have existed in other parts of Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban for more than three years. But Western agencies had hoped that the Taliban would treat Kabul, a cosmopolitan city of about 1 million, as a special case.

Mahmad was convicted and sentenced to death under the previous government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani for his part in the murders of Alif's family.

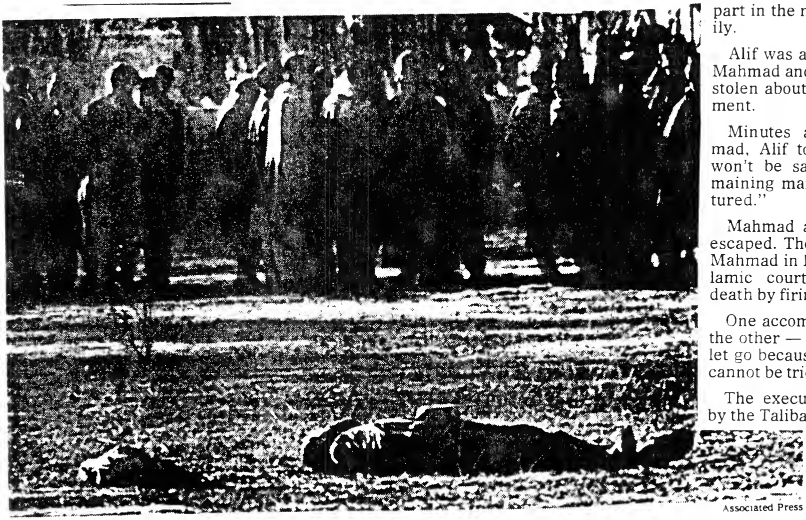
Alif was a money-changer, and Mahmad and his accomplices had stolen about $300 from his apartment.

Minutes after shooting Mahmad, Alif told Radio Sharia, "I won't be satisfied until the remaining man in the case is captured."

Mahmad and two accomplices escaped. The Taliban recaptured Mahmad in November, and an Islamic court sentenced him to death by firing squad.

One accomplice is at large, and the other — a teenage girl — was let go because she is a minor and cannot be tried, Alam said.

The execution was sanctioned by the Taliban's Islamic Council.



Associated Press

Convicted of murder by a Taliban court, Ghulam Mohammed lies dead on a soccer field in Kabul, Afghanistan, after he was executed with an automatic rifle by the man whose wife and children he had slain.

THE PLAIN DEALER

12/19/96

PAPER BAGS A NO-NO From Reuters, 12/9/96:

KABUL, Afghanistan (Reuter) - Afghanistan's Taleban movement has banned paper bags as part of its campaign to impose pure Islamic law.¶

"We respect paper, whether it is written on or not. We have announced that people should not use paper for bags or put paper on the garbage heap," Amir Khan Mutaqi, the acting information minister in the Taleban administration, said Monday.¶

"People should use plastic bags instead of paper." he said.¶

On Chicken Street, where most of Kabul's small foreign community shops for western goods, shopkeepers said they had had a run on toilet paper from customers unsure how wide the paper ban would extend.¶

Paper bags are used in preference to more expensive plastic bags in most of Kabul's markets. Many women eke out a meager living by turning discarded paper into bags and selling them to merchants.¶

"I used to work for the government, I need to sell bags to feed my family. What else can I do?" asked one fully veiled woman squatting in front of a small pile of paper bags in Kabul's Karte Parwan market.¶

When they took over Kabul in late September, the Taleban decreed that all working women should stay at home and venture out only if wearing a burqa, a shroud-like veil with only a small patch of gauze to see through.¶

One trader said the Taleban had told him to stop selling paper bags.¶

"The Taleban have said that no one is allowed to sell paper bags any more," said the trader, who declined to give his name. "They said there might be some words from the Holy Koran or Arabic writing on the paper which might then be thrown away and that would be an insult to the Holy Korán."¶

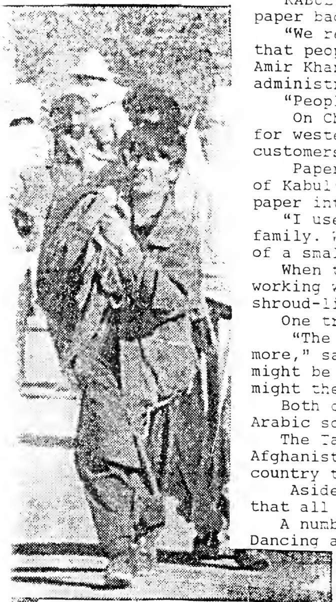
Both of Afghanistan's main languages, Pashtu and Dari, use the same Arabic script as the Koran.¶

The Taleban have vowed to impose their puritanical version of Islam on Afghanistan. They have issued a number of edicts in the 75 percent of the country they control to achieve this aim.¶

Aside from banning women from the workplace, the Taleban have decreed that all government workers grow beards.¶

A number of civil servants were recently sacked for being clean-shaven. Dancing and all non-religious music have also been banned.¶

Getting away from war



Afghanistan refugees flee from the front-line villages north of Kabul

In Afghanistan, culture is a casualty of war

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HERAT, Afghanistan — For centuries, Herat stood out among Afghan cities for its grace, aristocracy and poetic Persian culture.

Residents gathered in the evenings to listen to literature and music. Families packed food and traveled in gaily decorated horse-drawn carts for picnics in the city's many parks.

For the most part, Herat also escaped the bloodshed that wracked other regions during Afghanistan's long civil war. Even when soldiers of the Taliban religious army moved in, the transition was not violent.

But today, the city of 500,000 people about 370 miles west of Kabul, the capital, has been shorn of its carefree ways. Taliban fighters have cracked down on even the smallest secular pleasures — poetry, song, music, volleyball, kite-flying.

Having found themselves under much closer scrutiny since capturing Kabul this year, Taliban leaders have hinted at softening their strict version of Islam.

But their actions in Herat may say more about plans for Afghanistan than any pronouncements directed at Westerners.

Gone are the singers accompanied by the rubab, a stringed instrument, and the drummers who entertained while people ate kebabs and roasted chicken and sipped green tea at the Park Hotel.

A wedding procession of a bus and two cars passes by silently, without the band that traditionally saw a young couple off into marriage. The lone sign of merrymaking is a young boy mischievously spraying deodorant from an aerosol can at passers-by.

The only melody in the ancient bazaar is the jingle of bells on the horse-drawn carts that serve as taxis for the poor.

The one sound that stands out is the wail of sirens as Taliban soldiers speed by in pickup trucks with stacks of rocket-propelled grenades and a machine gun on top.

Taliban leaders say music, singing and television are decadent, un-Islamic and the root of much of Afghanistan's suffering. They disapprove of other Islamic countries for allowing music and poetry to flourish.

One of Herat's best known poets agrees to discuss life in the city but only on condition his name be kept secret.

Letting a reporter into his three-room home, the poet dusts plastic boxes holding cassettes of Afghan folk music. He shuts the door before connecting his tape player to a car battery. There is no electricity.

After playing a tape, he reads a poem written long ago but that expresses his sorrow for what has happened in Herat:

"I went to a tavern to drink a potion of love.

"But I found only sorrow.

"I still think about her.

"My tears are turned into blood."

War overran culture

For many, there was no place in Afghanistan like Herat. Although rule by the Muslim warlord chased out by Taliban troops was autocratic, it never interfered with culture.

Persian scholars like the poet sat most evenings with friends discussing the literary trends in Iran, meeting new poets and reading their own work aloud.

That ended when Taliban soldiers marched in on Sept. 5.

A man who ran a reading club in his library was ordered to stop because many of the books were declared un-Islamic. Singing and poetry were banned.

Many in Herat are learning to hide their passion for culture and music, swallowing their Persian pride and coping with the new masters — most of them uneducated soldiers who speak Pashto instead of Persian, a language with a richer literature.

Fear and suspicion pervade everyday life. Most people refuse to talk to foreigners and even to U.N. aid workers who have built hospitals, roads and a library. They avoid eye contact with Taliban soldiers.

To ensure edicts are observed, every street has a Taliban guardpost, manned by men with AK-47s.

"Even the slightest infringement of their rules can lead to a thrashing with barbed wire," says Farid, a clerk in a carpet shop.

He and his friends were recently ordered out of their neighborhood park for playing soccer in shorts. The soldiers said they could play but only in long pants.

Farid remembers rushing out of his shop six months ago to see Taliban soldiers parade a convicted man, his face blackened by charcoal, his hands tied behind his back.

"He was shouting out his confession about having slept with another man's wife," Farid says.

Others speak in hushed tones about the time that a man, convicted of murder by a Taliban religious court, was hanged in the stadium from a construction crane.

Law and order pervasive

But not everyone in Herat is unhappy. Some people say there was little law and order until the Taliban fighters arrived.

"Herat's streets and highways in the province were not safe from bandits. I agree with the Taliban that it is not safe for women to walk around here," says Mohammed Qasim, a religious student at Herat University.

Aid workers, speaking on condition of anonymity, also say that relief convoys from Pakistan or Kabul are safer in Taliban territory.

Herat's boss is Yar Mohammad, an Islamic mullah whose first act was to remove all the paintings that had adorned the city hall for decades.

His militia went around knocking down statues, ransacking hotels for musical instruments and storming into houses with TV antennas and smashing television sets.

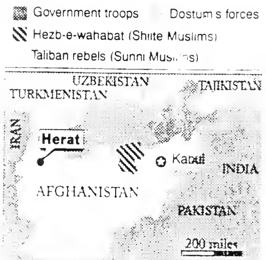
"When they came in they broke musical instruments and strung them on pine trees to make their point," says Abdul Hadi Sadiq, who lost his job as head of Herat's radio and TV stations after the Taliban takeover.

The new rulers stopped television broadcasts as "unclean." Radio broadcasts are limited to information and religious messages.

Women were ordered off the streets and banned from offices, schools, colleges and hospitals. Later, the Taliban relented and allowed women doctors and nurses to return to work.

Justice is quick and simple under Yar Mohammad. Lashes and jail for adultery, hands chopped off for stealing, death by hanging for murder.

The testimony of four people is enough under Islamic laws for a conviction; a whip hangs on the wall behind the desk of the chief of the court. ❑



The Associated Press

DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE
ROCHESTER, N.Y
DECEMBER 8, 1996

No television for Afghans as Taliban grab controls

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HERAT, Afghanistan — In a dusty room, the head of Herat's government television and radio stations sits under a huge white cloth banner that declares "God is great."

There is little work for Nazar Mohammed Shafiyaq to do, even if he knew anything about broadcasting. His main qualifications are a background in journalism and devotion to the Taliban movement's strict version of Islam.

The austere Islamic fundamentalists who seized control of this city once renowned in Afghanistan for its poetry and culture have banned television as "haram" — unclean. They allow only information and religious programming on the radio.

"We don't want haram things on television like women," Shafiyaq says.

Trucks piled high with Sony television sets rumble through Herat, carrying imports from Iran to the northern provinces not under Taliban control.

But no Herat resident is allowed to watch television.

"People who had musical instruments at home hide them. They can play only secretly," says Abdul Hadi Sadiq, Shafiyaq's predecessor as head of broadcasting in Herat.

Sadiq has been demoted but not dismissed, so he comes each day and walks around the locked studios and rooms where the Taliban have stored audio and video tapes.

He says he still helps with some radio programs.

"We now have farming programs, prayers, news and some religious poetry in Pashto," Sadiq says. That is the language of the Pashtun people who form the cultural core of the Taliban.

Most Herat residents speak Persian.

Many people now tune in to Iranian radio at the risk of being discovered by the Taliban and punished with a thrashing, Sadiq says.

In alcoves among the shops in Herat's ancient bazaar, men huddle around transistor radios, listening to the news broadcast from Meshad, the Iranian city closest to Herat. ❑

AFGHANISTAN FORUM

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THE AFGHANISTAN FORUM, INC.
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ABBREVIATIONS USED

ACBAR	- Agency Coordinating Bureau for Afghan Relief
ANS	- Afghan News Service
ARIC	- Afghan Resource & Information Center
BIA	- Bakhtar Information Agency
CSM	- Christian Science Monitor
FBIS	- Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FRG	- Federal Republic of Germany
ICRC	- Int'l Committee of the Red Cross
LAT	- Los Angeles Times
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organization
NWFP	- Northwest Frontier Province
NYT	- New York Times
OIC	- Organization of Islamic Conference
PCV	- Peace Corps Volunteer
PT	- Pakistan Times
PVO	- Private Voluntary Organization
UNGA	- United Nations General Assembly
UNOCA	- United Nations Office of the Commissioner for Afghanistan (sometimes UNOCHA)
UNHCR	- United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USAID	- United States Agency for Int'l Development
WP	- Washington Post
WSJ	- Wall Street Journal

Please send items for the AFGHANISTAN FORUM to

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Subscription rates: $25 per year (US & Canada) (Add $5 for FORUM PAPERS)
$25 per year (foreign); airmail Europe - $35; Asia - $40
4 issues/year $35 per year (institutions) $45 $50
(includes FORUM PAPERS)

ISSN: 0889-2148